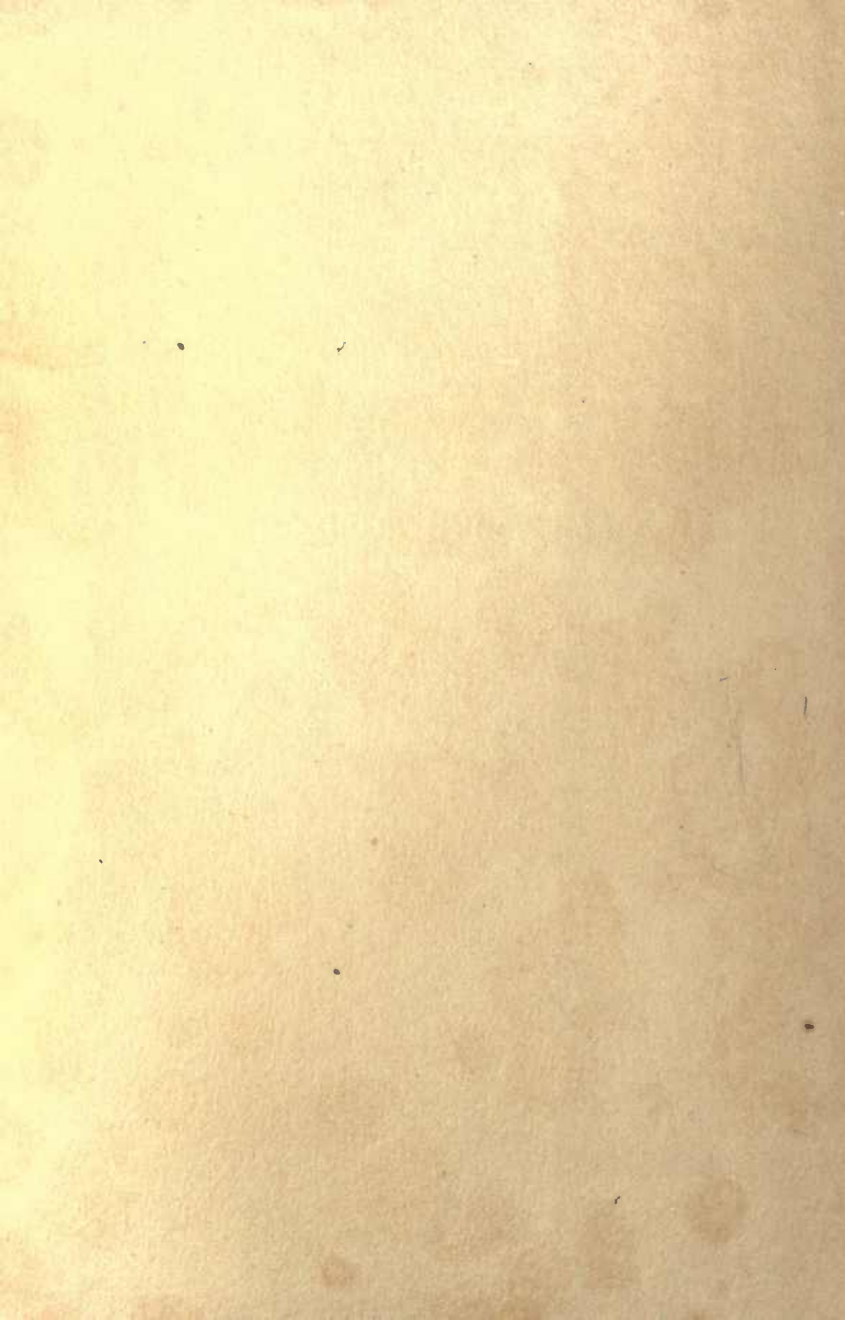


PLAYMATE POLLY

AMY E. BLANCHARD

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PLAYMATE POLLY





THE WHISPERING TREES SEEMED TO SAY, "WE
KNOW, WE KNOW"

PLAYMATE POLLY

BY

AMY E. BLANCHARD

Author of "Little Miss Oddity," "Little Miss Mouse," "Little Sister Anne," "Mistress May," etc.

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CHAPTER I
Up Hill and Down

CHAPTER I

Up Hill and Down

WHEN Jessie started out in the morning to school, she began at the gate to say to herself, "Bridge, Railroad, Hill," and when she started home again if she came alone, it was "Hill, Railroad, Bridge." Home was at one end of the journey; school at the other; Bridge, Railroad and Hill were the stations between, Jessie told herself. If she were reasonably early, she would stop on the bridge and peep over at the running water. At the railroad she seldom stopped except to say good-morning to Ezra Limpett who sat outside his little box of a house on sunny days, and inside it on rainy ones. He always held out the red flag to show the engineer, when the trains went whizzing by. Once, when the train was behind time, he had allowed Jessie to hold the fluttering flag, but that was on her way home, and he had said she must never cross till the train had passed. It was on account of Ezra

that Jessie was allowed to go to the Hill school, for he never failed to be at his post watching for her, and Jessie's father knew she would be perfectly safe in crossing the track because Ezra was there. Of course, it was pleasanter to come from school than to go to it, not only because it was down hill and home was at the far end of the way, but because Effie Hinsdale could come nearly as far as the railroad with her, and a companion always makes the distance seem shorter. Furthermore, there was time then to loiter, unless one felt very hungry, though loitering meant a talk with Ezra about the engines and the trains. The engines were always spoken of as *her* and *she* and were known by their numbers.

One day when Jessie was about to skip across the railroad ties, she heard Ezra call out: "Better wait a bit. 589 ain't came along yet. She's late to-day by ten minutes, and she's due just about now."

"Will you let me hold the flag?" said Jessie, turning aside.

Ezra nodded. "Hold her good and tight, and don't stand too near. She'll go kitin' to-day because she's behind time. Here, stand on this

stone and I'll hold on to ye. That's her whistle now, so up with ye."

Jessie scrambled upon the stone and gripped the flag tightly, while Ezra took a firm hold upon her. The train was in sight in a second, and almost before she could wink, it went flying by, scattering the dust and causing Jessie's skirts to flutter in the breeze it made. It was very exciting, though it was something of a relief to see the tail end of the train disappear down the track.

"Wouldn't like to be in her way, would ye?" said Ezra, helping the little girl down.

"Indeed, I wouldn't," replied Jessie decidedly. "Do you like better to be inside your funny little house, Ezra, or outside it?"

"That depends. Wet days I'm glad to be in; sorter cozy with a fire and my pipe going. 'Tain't very big, but it's fair enough shelter, and it ain't as if I hadn't a roomier place to actually live in. I don't have it so very bad, for there ain't no night trains and I can get home and have my night's rest. I'm always in by nine, for there ain't no trains after six. If this was a big trunk line now, the trains would be chugging by all night."

"Then don't the conductors and engineers ever sleep?"

"Some of 'em mighty little. There's hard tales about how they're worked. Folks all well?"

"Yes, thank you," returned Jessie, picking up her books which she had dropped on the ground, and being reminded by Ezra's remark that she must not stay too long. "I reckon I'd better be going now; mother might be worrying about me."

Ezra nodded. "That's right. Days gettin' kinder short, too. You won't get home much before sundown, come winter."

"Won't I?" Jessie had not thought of this. "I'll always have to hurry then."

"And you won't find me settin' out in the cold so over often," said Ezra.

"Good-bye," said Jessie.

Ezra nodded and waved a stubby hand as if to a departing train, while Jessie ran across the track and took up the last part of her accustomed chant. Hill and Railroad were passed, so there was only Bridge left. "Bridge, Bridge, Bridge, Bridge," she whispered, keeping time to her

pace, and very soon Bridge, too, was left behind and she was within sight of the lane, the house, the barn, and, last, her mother's anxious face at the window.

"You're late, dear," said Mrs. Loomis, as the little girl came into the sitting-room.

"Yes," returned Jessie. "589 was behind time and Ezra wouldn't let me come till she had passed. He let me hold the flag. I like the train to be late for it is exciting to have her go by so fast it almost takes your breath."

"I don't like it to be late," replied Mrs. Loomis, "for I always feel anxious about you till you get home. If Ezra were not there, and if I didn't know we could absolutely depend upon him to watch out for you, I don't know what we should do."

"What do you think you would do?" asked Jessie. "Would you or father have to come for me? Would you have to do that?"

"No, we couldn't do that very well. We should have to send for you, probably, or else keep you from school altogether."

"I'd like that," said Jessie in a satisfied tone.

"You'd like to grow up a silly little dunce?"

returned her mother, "and not know how to read or write? Would you like Max and Walter to come home from school and be ashamed of their little sister?"

"Oh, no," Jessie was quite sure she would not. "But," she said after a moment's thought, "everybody doesn't have to go to school. Cousin Lillian does not. I could have a governess."

"That is what you would have to have, though it would be rather expensive. The boys have to go away to school and it costs a good deal for them. But we'll not bother over the question while Ezra is on hand, for now it is perfectly safe for you to go to the Hill school."

"Suppose something should happen to Ezra," said Jessie, persistently following up the subject. "I should hate anything to happen to him, but if it should, and another man were to take his place, then would I have to stop going to school?"

"I'm sure I don't know, child. We won't discuss it now. It will be time enough when such a thing happens." And Mrs. Loomis went out, leaving Jessie standing by the window.

Jessie stood for a few minutes looking out and then she, too, left the room. It was time to feed

the chickens and after that her father would be coming in. The corn had been harvested and stood stacked in the fields. Jessie thought the stacks looked very much like Indian wigwams and she pictured to herself her terror if they really were such. However, the terror was not very keen and was soon forgotten when she reached the spot where the fowls were jostling one another and pecking eagerly at the corn Minerva was scattering on the ground. Minerva was the servant who had lived in the family ever since she was a little girl. She was very fond of Jessie and the two often had long talks about the chickens, the pigeons, the ducks and the turkeys.

"There's two young turkeys missing," said Minerva as Jessie appeared. "After I get through here you can go 'long with me if you like and look 'em up. You're a right good hand for spying 'em out and they do beat everything for wandering."

"I believe I know where they are," Jessie told her. "I shouldn't wonder if they were over there where the mountain cherries grow. I've seen them there lots of times."

"Then that's where we'll look for 'em," said

Minerva, scattering another handful of corn. "They're big enough now not to care much about being with the old ones, and I have to keep an eye on 'em."

"Have you fed the young chickens yet?" asked Jessie. "How fast they do eat, Minerva. Look at that great piggy rooster driving away that smaller one. I never did like that old yellow fellow, anyhow."

"He is kind of greedy," agreed Minerva. "No, I haven't fed the young chickens. You can mix the meal if you like. Don't make it too wet like you did last time. Mrs. Speckle is a little droopy; she don't take her food well at all. She's such a good layer, I hope there's nothing wrong with her."

Jessie moved away to get the meal. Two measures of it she carefully piled up in the tin box which she found in the bin. This she emptied into a pan and then she poured in a little water at a time, stirring it with a spoon at first, and then with her whole hand. She liked the operation, and was so interested in squeezing the wet meal that Minerva finally had to call her.

"If you're going to help me hunt those turkeys, you'd better hurry with that meal," she said.

Jessie carried the tin pan to the enclosure where the young chickens were making a great fuss, poking their heads between the slats and peeping anxiously. But their peeping soon stopped as Jessie scattered little dabs of the food on the ground. "Don't gather the eggs till I come," she called to Minerva whom she saw searching the nests.

"Obliged to," returned Minerva, "or there'll be no time to look up the turkeys. It gets dark so much sooner these days, you know."

With one swoop of the wooden spoon Jessie swept the rest of the meal into a pile on the ground, set down the pan and joined Minerva. "How many are there to-day?" she asked.

"Ten, so far."

Jessie climbed upon a box and peered into a corner. "There are two more here," she said. "Shall I take them?"

"If you're careful not to break them," Minerva told her.

Jessie gently lifted one egg at a time and put

it in the basket Minerva carried. "That makes a dozen," she said.

"And here's another in this nest," Minerva went on. "Old Posy is laying again, I expect."

This was the last egg found, and the two left the hen-house. Minerva carried the basket into the house and then she and Jessie started off toward a corner near the garden where the mountain cherries grew, and where many other wild things made a close thicket, so that it was hard to penetrate the middle of the place. But Jessie had been there many a time. It was one of her favorite spots in summer. So now she pressed her body through the tangle of blackberry vines, pokeweed, sumach and laurel bushes to a less crowded part of the thicket. There was a dogwood tree here, and upon its lower branches sat the two turkeys entirely satisfied with the roost they had selected for the night.

"Here they are," sang out Jessie.

Minerva followed the little girl. "Well, I declare!" she exclaimed. "It takes you to find 'em. I believe you know every foot of this place." She grabbed first one turkey, then another. They set up protesting cries which were

of no use whatever, for Minerva held them firmly and carried them home triumphantly under each arm. "It's too cold for you to be out," she said, addressing the turkeys. "I should think you'd have better sense. I shouldn't wonder if we were to have frost to-night, and then where would your toes be?"

"Why, they'd be under them all covered up with feathers," put in Jessie.

Minerva laughed. "You know more about it than I do, it seems. Well, anyhow, they'd better be in where it's safe and warm. Young turkeys are delicate. Besides, some crittur might catch them."

This was not to be denied as Jessie informed the turkeys. "You're much safer in the hen-house, you two silly things," she said, "so you ought to be much obliged to us for getting you. I'm sure I shouldn't want to stay out in the cold and dark all night and have wild beasts get after me. Minerva, that yellow house just this side the bridge must be taken, for there are people living in it. I saw a cat sitting on the porch and there was a little rocking-chair in the garden. Do you suppose it belonged to a little girl?"

"It might. I should say it was very likely to. Little boys don't usually care for rocking-chairs."

"I hope it is a nice little girl and that I shall get acquainted with her," returned Jessie. "Effie Hinsdale is my nearest girl friend and neighbor and she lives across the railroad track. Mother says twice a day is as often as she likes to think of my crossing the track, but when Ezra is there I shouldn't think she'd mind."

"I should think she would mind," said Minerva. "Don't you see enough of the girls at school?"

"Ye-es," said Jessie doubtfully, "I suppose I do, but it's only at recess, you know, for I always hurry home. I was late to-day because 589 was behind time."

"That's the four o'clock, isn't it?"

"Yes, but Ezra always calls her 589."

"And that's why you do. I suppose that's a fairly good reason. There's your father and Sam coming up the lane. I'll put up the turkeys and you can open the gate for them."

Jessie ran down the long avenue of trees which led up to the house, opened the gate and stood there while her father drove in.

"Climb up, Puss," he said, "and I'll take you around to the barn. Been a good girl to-day? Missed any lessons?"

"I didn't know how to spell 'conscientious,'" Jessie told him, "and two examples weren't quite right."

"That's not so bad. A good many people don't know how to spell 'conscientious,'" said her father with a little laugh. "Any demerits?"

"One," said Jessie a little shamefacedly and quickly changing the subject. "I held the flag for 589," she said. "Ezra let me."

"The train was late, I know," said Mr. Loomis. "I heard the whistle and hoped you were safe across."

"I wasn't. Ezra wouldn't let me go, though there was plenty of time. He said suppose I should fall."

Her father nodded. "He's right. Nice old chap, Ezra is. Well, here we are. Run in and tell Minerva that Sam has a basket of peaches in the wagon. They're the last we'll get this year."

"Where did you get them, father?"

"From that tree over in the south field; it's

a late variety, but they will be pretty good for preserves."

"I'm going to have one before that happens," said Jessie, running into the kitchen and meeting Sam just as he was bringing in the peaches.

"Work for you to-morrow, Minervy," he said as he set down the basket.

"That's so," returned Minerva. "Well, I don't mind. Them white peaches makes fine preserves and we haven't any too many peaches put up this year. Hungry, Sam?"

"You bet," he replied. "Always am. Seems to me I don't more'n get one meal down than I'm ready for another."

"It ain't quite as bad as that," returned Minerva. "I'll have your supper ready in the shake of a sheep's tail. By the time you've done milking, anyway."

Sam went out with the milk-buckets and Jessie returned to the sitting-room. Her father was at his desk, setting down some accounts; her mother was watering the plants which had lately been brought in and put in the south windows. Jessie stood looking out into the gathering twilight. Everything showed forth

duskily. Many of the trees were shedding their leaves. Down by the brook a row of willows looked fantastically like people with big heads and wild hair, Jessie thought. There was one quite small, which seemed very human. Jessie regarded it interestedly for some time before she turned and said, "Mother, what is the little tree down by the brook? the one with a funny head. What's its name?"

"Pollard Willow," replied her mother, glancing out of the window toward the place Jessie pointed out.

"Polly Willow," whispered Jessie to herself. "Polly Willow! What a funny name."



CHAPTER II
Playmate Polly

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Playmate Polly

It was some time after this that Jessie made the acquaintance of Polly Willow and it came about in a way that Jessie had not expected. It was due in the beginning to 589 which seemed of late to be getting into a habit of tardiness. One morning when Jessie was going to school she missed her good friend Ezra at the door of his little house. A stranger was there, a gruff sort of somebody who cried out sharply: "Get over there quick, sissy. You ain't no business crossing tracks when trains is coming."

"There isn't any train coming," said Jessie. "I know all about the trains. There isn't any after the 803 when 411 comes along. The next train is at twelve and the one after at four."

"Much you know," replied the man. "I suppose the president of the road has sent you a special message saying he's just changed the fall

schedule. I had my information from Ezra, but I reckon he don't know. He told me to look out for a train at 8:35."

"There wasn't any such train on Friday," said Jessie.

"Fall schedule hadn't come into effect. Time changes to-day."

"Where is Ezra?" asked Jessie, still unbelieving, but by this time safely across the track.

"Took down with rheumatiz. Been bothering him on and off for some time. Now he's laid up in bed."

"Dear me, but I am sorry," said Jessie.

"That don't cure his aches and pains," returned the man. "You'd better hustle along, sis. I've got to signal to this here train and I can't stand here all day talking to you."

Jessie turned away indignantly. Ezra would have asked if she didn't want to hold the flag when the train went by, and he would not have told her in that rude way to "go along." She did not like this man at all. She wondered if Ezra would be ill all winter, and then suddenly she thought of what her mother had said; that if anything happened to Ezra, her parents would

not feel that they could allow Jessie to take the walk to the Hill School.

However, Ezra and the trains were forgotten when the little girl reached school, for there were several interesting things to take up her thoughts that morning. In the first place, there was a new scholar named Anna Sharp. She had come to live with her aunt in the neighborhood and was going to attend the Hill School. Next Effie Hinsdale whispered that there were four dear new kittens in the barn and that Jessie could have one if she liked. Effie had been given a demerit for whispering, and that had so disturbed Jessie that she missed her geography lesson and had to recite it after school, so altogether there was quite enough to put Ezra out of her mind.

She remembered him before she reached the railroad, and then she determined that she would not pay the least attention to the flagman who was taking Ezra's place, but that she would run across the tracks without turning her head. She had not resisted the temptation to stop at Effie's long enough to see the new kittens, and had chosen the gray one, so that it was later than

usual when she reached the railroad. Of course 589 must have gone by, for it was the express and was due at four o'clock. There could not be the least danger, thought Jessie. She saw that the flagman had his back to her and was standing looking up the track. She made haste to cross before he could see her, and, in her hurry, she tripped over the rail and her books were scattered in every direction. She picked herself up and was about to gather her books together when she heard the shrill whistle of an approaching train, while from up the track she saw the express rapidly advancing upon her. For a second she stood, numb with fright, and then she leaped across the rails, her heart beating fast. Another moment and the train went flying by. She was safe if her books were not. She saw her geography go careering down the road, her arithmetic lying some distance away, and her reader nowhere to be seen. But books were of no account just then. The child's whole thought was to get home as quickly as possible. Without looking back once she sped along as fast as she could run, tears coursing down her cheeks and herself so shaken that when she

reached home she burst into the sitting-room and flung herself, sobbing, into her mother's arms.

"Why, my darling, what is the matter?" asked Mrs. Loomis anxiously.

"589 was late and Ezra has the rheumatism and they have changed the time and I tripped on a rail and lost my books. There was a horrid man there, too, and he called me 'sis.'"

In this rather mixed-up speech her mother recognized that something alarming had really happened. "Never mind, dearie," she said soothingly. "Wait till you can stop crying and then tell me all about it. Mother has you safe anyhow, hasn't she?" She cuddled the little girl closely in her lap and in a few minutes Jessie was able to give a better account of what had occurred.

Mrs. Loomis looked very grave as she shook her head. "Thank heaven," she said, "that you were not so bewildered as to stand still. We didn't know the winter schedule was in effect. Ezra would have sent us word if he had not been ill. Oh, my child!" She hugged Jessie suddenly to her and after a moment continued, "It is clear to me that it is not safe for you to go to

school by yourself. I will see if we can arrange to have Sam take you, and I might be able to spare Minerva to bring you home. You could go as far as the Hinsdales and wait there for her. I should never have an easy moment if you were to go over that road alone. Try to forget this afternoon's fright, dear child, and go talk to Minerva. I see your father coming."

Jessie went to Minerva and helped her feed the chickens, almost forgetting in this task, that she had been so frightened. But after supper her father took her on his knee and questioned her about the matter.

"No more school for you yet a while, miss," he said. "I can't spare Sam just now for I am a man short, and it won't hurt you to stay at home for a week while we plan what is to be done next. I pinned my faith on Ezra, but now that he is out of the question we shall have to think of some other way of doing."

So the next day Jessie stayed home from school, and not only the next, but for several days she was free to wander about the place and do pretty much as she pleased. "She's had a bad fright," said Mr. Loomis to his wife, "and

she is a nervous, imaginative little thing, so she'd better stay out-of-doors all she can till she gets over this. I don't think we need let her bother with lessons for a while yet."

The first day Jessie amused herself near the house; the next she wandered as far as the mountain cherry-tree; the third found her down by the brook, and there she saw Polly Willow waiting for her.

"I've just got to have somebody to play with," said Jessie, looking at Polly Willow's funny head. "I think maybe you'll do for a playmate, Polly. There's one thing about it; you can't run away and you'll always be here when I want you. Of course you are pretty big, but so are the other people in your family. You are much the smallest of any of them, so I don't suppose you are any older than I. I think the first thing I do must be to get you a hat. I know where there is one I think I can have."

She ran back to the house and up to the attic where she found an old straw hat. On her way down she stopped at the door of her mother's room to poke in her head and say: "May I have this, mother?"

"What is it?"

"An old hat. I want to play with it."

Her mother glanced at the hat. "Yes, you may have it. Where are you playing?"

"Down by the brook."

"Don't get your feet wet. So long as you have your rubbers on and are in the open air, I am satisfied."

With the hat in hand Jessie ran back to the brook. The fallen leaves already dappled its surface with red and yellow, but goldenrod and asters made a gay fringe along the sides. Sitting down on a fallen log she proceeded to trim the hat with flowers. A plume of goldenrod decorated one side; a bunch of asters the other, and when it was finished, Jessie stood on tiptoe and stuck the hat on Polly's big head. "It's rather small for you," she said as she gravely regarded the effect, "but it makes you look more like a little girl. Now, Polly, we'll play. I'm going to live over there." She waved her hand in the direction of a large rock a short distance away. "I see Mrs. Mooky is coming to see me, so I shall have to go, but I'll come over again after a while. Good-bye, Polly."

A pretty fawn-colored cow was grazing near the big rock. This was the person Jessie called Mrs. Mooky. The little girl was not in the least afraid of cows, of this one in particular, for she had been accustomed to seeing Mrs. Mooky ever since she was a little calf which had fed from her hand. So now she approached her boldly, saying, "Good-morning, Mrs. Mooky. I'm very glad to see you. I am sorry I was not at home when you called just now, but I had to run over to Polly's. She has a new hat that she wanted me to see."

The cow lifted her head and gave a gentle "moo."

"I understand," Jessie went on. "You'll come again some other day. Very well. Good-bye." And the cow moved on. "I'm going to ask mother if I can't have a tea-party here with Playmate Polly. No, I won't say with Playmate Polly; she might laugh. A grown person couldn't exactly understand how nice it is to have a Playmate Polly for a friend. I'll bring one of the dolls, and—oh, dear, I wish the gray kitten were big enough. Mother says I can't have it till it is quite able to do without its mother,

so I'll have to wait, and I shall have to get Charity."

Again she went back to the house, this time to get the doll which had been bought at a bazaar in the city by Jessie's aunt who had suggested the old-fashioned name of Charity for her, since it was a charity bazaar at which she had been bought, and because the doll was dressed in a very old-fashioned costume to represent a Colonial Dame. She had now a long cloak to cover her brocade frock, a cloak that Jessie had made from a piece of gray flannel, and in consequence of her having this warm garment, Jessie thought her better prepared for outdoor play than the other dolls.

"May I have something for a party? I'm taking Charity with me down to the brook," she said to her mother whom she found in the kitchen.

"Why, yes," said her mother, "what do you want?"

"What is it that smells so good?"

"Peach marmalade, I suspect. We're making some."

"I'd like some of that on some bread."

"It's hot," said Minerva, "and it isn't done yet, but I reckon it will taste good and it will soon cool off in the open air. What will you have it in? Oh, I know; one of those little jars the beef extract comes in. There are some in the pantry on the shelf behind the door."

Jessie set Charity on one of the kitchen chairs, and went to the pantry for the little jar which Minerva filled with marmalade. She then cut a couple slices of bread, buttered them and put them wrapped in a napkin, into a small egg basket, adding the jar of preserves and an apple. "Be careful how you carry it," she warned Jessie. "You don't want to smear that sticky stuff all over the basket, and be sure to bring it and the jar back when you come. Now, don't forget."

"I'll remember," said Jessie. "Thank you, Minerva. I shall have a lovely time."

"Here, come back," cried Minerva, as Jessie went out. "I didn't put in any spoon. Would you rather have a spoon or a knife?"

"A spoon, I think," said Jessie, "for then if I want to eat any preserves I can do it easier, and a spoon will do to spread with, too."

"One of the kitchen spoons, Minerva," said

Mrs. Loomis. "We don't want the silver lost at the bottom of the brook."

Jessie was quite satisfied with a kitchen spoon and went happily on her way, holding the little basket and her doll, carefully. "We're going over to Playmate Polly's, Charity," she informed her doll. "You don't know her, but she is a very nice little girl, just the kind I like. She knows all about the flowers and birds and such things, for she lives right down by the brook where they live. She told me this morning that she is very intimate with the birds especially, and now that they are going south for the winter she would be very lonely if I didn't play with her. I think she will be glad to see you, too, for I am sure she doesn't have much company these days. Mrs. Mooky comes pretty often, but then she is not a little girl like me, and that makes a great difference."

Talking thus to her doll, she went on her way and soon reached the brook. The marmalade was still warm, but when it was spread on the bread which Jessie laid out on the red doily, it soon cooled, and if Jessie was obliged to eat both Polly's and Charity's share by proxy, she did not

have to eat for the birds, who were glad of the crumbs, and who, when the last speck had vanished, came near enough to look inquiringly with their bright eyes as if to ask, Is that all?

"Now, Polly," said Jessie, "I'm going to ask you to take care of Charity for me a little while. She isn't very well this morning, and I want to see the doctor about her. You know Dr. Bramble, of course."

Polly, answering in Jessie's voice, said she knew Dr. Bramble very well indeed, that he was a sharp sort of person, and often very disagreeable, but that he was a good doctor and his cordial fine stuff.

So, leaving Charity in Polly's care, Jessie went to hunt up Dr. Bramble. She was obliged to stay quite a while for when she reached his house she found that Mrs. Bramble had a few belated blackberries for her, and they were so tempting that Jessie was obliged to gather them all. "They'll do finely for pills for Charity," she said, "or maybe I'd better make medicine of them; I can mash them in the jar with the spoon and give her a teaspoonful at a time!"

The berries were rather hard and could not be

easily crushed, but finally Jessie accomplished the work and Charity was given her first dose, though she cried a good deal over it and insisted that she could not take it. "But you must, my dear," said Jessie firmly, "or you will not get well. Do you want to be ill and not have any more of the nice marmalade Minerva is making?"

Charity deciding that she preferred marmalade to illness, at last took the medicine by means of Jessie's mouth, and was then put to bed and covered up with leaves. Then Jessie amused herself a long while with Playmate Polly. They talked about many things; the birds, the fishes, the flowers, the gray kitten and of Charity's illness, and the time went so pleasantly that when the dinner horn sounded Jessie had no idea that it was so late. She had enjoyed her morning hugely, and had come to have a great affection for her new friend, Playmate Polly.

CHAPTER III

The Neighbor of the Yellow House

CHAPTER III

The Neighbor of the Yellow House

EVERY morning after this Jessie went down to the brook to play with Playmate Polly. Charity soon recovered from her illness, Dr. Bramble's medicine being the very thing for her, and she was able to enjoy her share of the scrapings of marmalade which Jessie ate for her from the big preserving-kettle. Mrs. Mooky called frequently, and so did other persons. Jessie made the acquaintance of a lively cricket which lived under the big stone that she was accustomed to call her house, and she also had several conversations with a fat toad which would come out and blink at her on mild days. Still it was Playmate Polly whom Jessie liked the best. She kept the knowledge of this queer friend a secret from everybody, and for that very reason probably enjoyed her the more.

One afternoon, however, when she and Polly

had been having a particularly interesting talk, Jessie heard a laugh from the other side of the brook, and looking up quickly she saw a little girl with very black hair and eyes, astride a fallen log. "Hello!" said the little girl.

Jessie looked at her interestedly. "Hello!" she responded. She had never seen the little girl before;—not at church, nor on the road, nor anywhere, and she wondered who she could be. "Who are you?" she asked presently, "and how did you get over there?"

"I'm Adele Pauline Falaise Hallett," was the reply, "and I got here by walking."

"Goodness! what a long name," said Jessie. "Do you live near here?"

"Yes, I live in the yellow house this side the bridge."

"Oh, I know now," returned Jessie; "you're the new people. Did you come through the woods or by the road?"

"Through the woods. What's your name?"

"Jessie Loomis."

"Who was it that you've been talking to all this time? I looked and listened for ever so long and I couldn't see anybody."

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"I was talking to my doll, Charity, part of the time," said Jessie, after a little hesitation. She did not want to tell her secrets to a stranger.

"Who is Polly Somebody? You kept saying Polly this and Polly that. Have you a parrot over there?"

"Dear me, no," returned Jessie. "I was talking to a make-believe friend of mine."

"What kind of friend? Can't you see her truly?"

"Yes, I can see her. She's this tree." Jessie laid her hand affectionately on Playmate Polly's rough bark.

Adele laughed. "That's a mighty funny sort of friend. I'm coming over to you. Where can I get across?"

"There's a log higher up," Jessie told her. "I cross that way sometimes, and in summer when the brook is very low I can cross on the stones."

"It isn't so very low now."

"No, and so you'd better try the log. I'll show you where it is." She took the path on one side the brook, Adele following that on the other, and pretty soon they came to a log thrown across the stream.

"It's a little wobbly," said Jessie, "so you'd better be careful."

With some small shrieks and exclamations Adele managed to cross the bridge without mishap. "Now show me where you play," she said somewhat commandingly, Jessie thought, and therefore she led the way silently to her favorite spot.

"This is Playmate Polly," she said as if introducing a friend.

Adele laughed. "What do you call it that for?"

"Because it is her name," rejoined Jessie stoutly, as she turned toward the big stone near by. "This is my house," she went on; "it is where Charity and I live. Charity is my doll."

Adele, without answering, picked up Charity and looked her over. "She wears mighty queer clothes," she remarked after a moment.

"That's because she is a Colonial Dame," returned Jessie in a superior tone.

"Oh," said Adele, setting down Charity carefully. She did not know just what a Colonial Dame was and did not want to show her ignorance. "What do you call her Charity for?" she asked presently.

"My Aunt Lucy bought her at a charity bazaar, and she said as Charity was one of the old-fashioned names, she thought it would suit an old-fashioned doll. I like it," she added with decision.

"I knew a girl once named Temperance," remarked Adele. "They used to call her Tempy."

"Where was that?"

"In New Orleans where I lived before we came here; before—" she hesitated, and then added in a low voice, "before I lost my mother."

"Oh!" Jessie gazed at her with sympathetic eyes. She had never known, before this, any little girl who had not a mother. "Was it very long ago?" she asked softly.

"A little over a year," Adele told her. "I have six dolls," she went on, changing the subject. "How many have you?"

"Five, but I like Charity the best. She is the biggest and prettiest, too. I have one a little smaller named Lucy, and a little China boy-doll I like very much; he is about so high." She measured a height of four inches or so. "I bring him down here because he is so little that I can put him most anywhere."

"What is his name?" asked Adele.

"Peter Pan," returned Jessie. "Then I have a baby in long clothes and a German doll my uncle brought me when he came from Europe."

It seemed a very interesting family to Adele who said regretfully, "My dolls are so much alike I don't care much more for one than another. Some are newer than others; that's all. Will you show me all your dolls some day?"

"Why, certainly," returned Jessie warmly, adding, "I'm awfully glad you live near. There's no one this side the bridge at all. Effie Hinsdale is the nearest, but she lives across the railroad track."

"Aunt Betty won't let me cross it," said Adele.

"I used to do it every day; that was before Ezra had rheumatism. I don't go to school now. Do you go to the Hill school?" Jessie asked, then added, "Oh, no, of course you don't, if you can't cross the railroad track."

"No, I don't go anywhere," returned Adele. "I am going to have a governess next week."

"Shall you like that?"

"Oh, I don't know. I like Miss Eloise. She

is a friend of my aunt's and she is very nice and kind, at least she is now."

"I thought governesses were always cross," said Jessie as if it were a well-known fact.

"Maybe she will be when she gets to be a governess," Adele remarked. "I hope she will not. I believe I'd rather not have her anyway. I hate lessons."

"So do I," returned Jessie delightedly. "I'm so glad you feel that way. I was so pleased when I knew I could stay at home for a while."

"Are you going to stay away from school always?" asked Adele.

"Oh, I am sure I don't know. I suppose we have to have educations, but it is very disagreeable. I don't see why educations can't come like teeth, when you're ready for them, or an easier way still would be to wake up some morning and find you could do every example in the arithmetic, and another morning you could speak French, and another you would know all the rivers and capitals and mountains and things. Wouldn't that be fine?"

Adele laughed. "I wake up every morning and know I can speak French."

"Oh, do you?" Jessie looked at her half incredulously. "I didn't know any little girls could do that unless they were real French children who couldn't speak English. How does it happen?"

"My grandmother was French. I am named after her," Adele told her, "and my mother spoke French as well as English. I always had a French nurse, too, so I learned French at the same time I did English."

Jessie looked at her admiringly, then she sighed. "Well, I don't know a word of French or anything except 'Guten tag.' We had a German to work for us once and he taught me that much."

"Don't let's talk about such stupid things," said Adele suddenly. "What is behind those branches piled up against that place in the bank here?"

Jessie looked at her quickly. It seemed as if Adele's quick eyes and ears would discover all her secrets. "You won't tell?" she asked after a minute's pause. "Cross your heart you won't? It's a secret, you see. Playmate Polly is a secret, too. Not even mother or Minerva know about her."

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"I promise," said Adele readily. "Who is Minerva?"

"Our girl. She is as nice as she can be. I'm awfully fond of her."

"Show me what is behind the branches."

Jessie led the way to the spot where the bank dropped three or four feet. She carefully removed the branches, saying mysteriously: "It is a cave, a grotto."

Adele knelt down and peeped in to see where the bank, shelving in, made quite a little hollow. The floor of the small grotto was paved with pebbles upon which lay rugs of green moss. A piece of looking-glass set in the earth served for a tiny lake. The sides of the grotto were hung with another kind of moss. At one end two small candlesticks, bearing red candles, were set up and in a chair between them was the little china doll.

"This is where Peter Pan lives," said Jessie. "I'll light the candles and you can see the lake better. That pile of moss over there is Peter Pan's bed. I haven't any table for him yet. I am hunting for a nice little square block of wood, or a smooth round stone would do. I haven't

really finished the grotto yet. Don't you think it is right pretty?"

"It is perfectly beautiful," said Adele enthusiastically. "I don't see how you did it. Oh, won't you let me come and play with you sometimes?"

Jessie felt that she was very generous to be sharing her secrets with a stranger, but when she remembered that Adele was motherless she felt that anything she could do to give her pleasure would be a small thing, so she responded cordially, "Why, of course."

"I haven't any little doll like Peter Pan," Adele went on, "but maybe a paper doll would do till I could get the right kind."

"A paper doll would do very well and you could call her Wendy," said Jessie with satisfaction.

"Why?"

"Oh, don't you know Peter Pan? I thought every one did," said Jessie in surprise.

"Please tell me."

"All right, I will. I know all about him. When I went to see Aunt Lucy last winter she took me to see Peter Pan, and oh, it was the

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loveliest thing you can imagine. Sit down here and I will tell you." Adele did as she was told and Jessie launched forth into her story, Adele listening attentively.

But before the story was finished a shrill whistle sounded from the house. "Oh, dear," said Jessie jumping up, "I must go. That is for me."

"How do you know it is for you?"

"Mother has a little whistle that she blows whenever she wants me to come home."

"Can't you just stay long enough to finish the story?" said Adele coaxingly. "Please do."

"Oh, no, I couldn't. There is a lot more, and mother doesn't like me to stay out too late."

"She won't mind just this once."

Jessie hesitated and glanced toward the house. Again the whistle sounded.

Hastily gathering up Peter Pan and Charity she made ready to return home.

"I think you are real mean," cried Adele. "You just get into the most interesting part and then you stop. I don't like you one bit. I'm just going home and you can talk to your old dumb Polly after this." She stalked away

indignantly while Jessie slowly made her way toward the house, looking back every little while over her shoulder. She knew she was doing right, but she did wish Adele had not gone off in a huff. After all, perhaps Playmate Polly was more satisfactory, for she never quarreled with her. This thought made her turn and run back a few steps to call out: "Good-night, Polly."

Just then she heard a scream and some one crying out: "Jessie, Jessie!" in tones of distress. For only a second Jessie hesitated and then she rushed to the spot from which the voice came to find Adele splashing about in the brook.

"I slipped off the log," she cried. "I'm all wet and drowned and there is a cow coming!"

Fortunately the brook was not very deep, particularly at this point. Jessie laid down her dolls, and went to the bank near the log, reaching out her hands and calling to Adele, "Come up here."

Adele cast a frightened look over her shoulder at Mrs. Mooky, who was taking an evening drink from the stream. "She won't hurt you, wili you, Mrs. Mooky?" said Jessie encouragingly.

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The cow lifted her head and looked fixedly at Jessie, moving a few steps nearer.

"Oh, she's coming! She's coming!" cried Adele frantically trying to scramble up the bank.

"No, she isn't," Jessie assured her. "Give me your hand. There now, you are safe, but you are awfully wet. Come right home with me and get some dry clothes."

"No, no," protested Adele, "I'll go home."

"It's further to your house. You'd better come," said Jessie decidedly.

"It was all that horrid cow," said Adele. "She came splashing down into the water and scared me so my foot slipped and down I went."

Jessie smiled. She could not imagine any one being afraid of Mrs. Mooky, but she saw that Adele was really frightened so she only repeated: "You'd better come home with me."

"What will your mother say?" said Adele, still holding back.

"She'll say she's very sorry it happened, and she'll have Minerva take you home unless Sam is there with the carriage. Father went to town to-day and maybe Sam hasn't gone to meet him yet. Come right along; you'll get cold."

Thus admonished, Adele allowed herself to be led up to the house. Mrs. Loomis met the two little girls at the porch steps. "This is Adele Hallett," said Jessie. "She lives in the yellow house, and she slipped off the log into the brook just now. Mrs. Mooky frightened her."

"That was very unkind of Mrs. Mooky," said Mrs. Loomis smiling down at Adele. "Come in, dear. You must be chilled to the bone in those wet clothes. There is a good fire in the sitting-room. I always like to have it bright and cheery for Jessie's father when he comes in. Take your friend in there, Jessie, and I will go up for some dry clothes."

The open wood-fire was sending out a comforting heat as Adele shiveringly came up to it. "You'd better take off your shoes and stockings first; they are the wettest," Jessie told her. "Your feet must be very cold. I'll take off one shoe and you do the other."

Adele sat down meekly on the big fur rug, while Jessie helped her to take off her wet foot gear. "There," said Jessie, "stick out your feet and get them good and hot while I unbutton your frock." Adele obeyed without a word.

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Presently Mrs. Loomis returned with the dry things and bade Jessie take the wet ones to Minerva to dry. "We'll send them home to you," she told Adele as she helped her into Jessie's garments. They were a little large for her, but they did very well.

Jessie laughed when she came back. "It is another me, isn't it, mother?" she said. "Only that me isn't as big as this me, and it has black hair instead of light brown, and black eyes instead of blue. Do you feel as if your name were Jessie, and are you real warm, Adele?"

"I feel quite warm," said Adele in a low voice, her head drooping.

"I'm going to mix something good and hot for her to drink," said Mrs. Loomis, "and then Sam can take her home. Miss Hallett will be anxious about her, and Sam is about ready to go to the station to meet your father."

As soon as Mrs. Loomis had left the room Adele lifted her eyes, and Jessie saw that they were full of tears. "I said I didn't like you one bit," she burst out, "but I do, I do. I love you. I love you dearly."

"Oh!—why——" Jessie began. She felt em-

barrassed and was glad of her mother's reappearance. Mrs. Loomis held a glass in her hand. "Drink this, dear," she said to Adele. "You will find that it tastes very good and it will keep you from taking cold." Adele silently obeyed, and found it a spicy-sweet draught which sent a warm glow through her.

Jessie pulled her mother's head down to her level and whispered something to her. Mrs. Loomis nodded understandingly and when Adele set down the glass she lifted the child's face and kissed her gently on the cheek. "You must come again," she said.

"And will you take me to see her?" asked Jessie eagerly.

"To be sure I will," replied Mrs. Loomis. "I am going to call on your aunt, dear," she said to Adele, "and I hope we shall all be good friends and neighbors."

Adele looked at her for a moment and then she caught her hand and laid her own cheek against it. "You are lovely," she said, "and Jessie is just like you. I want her to be my friend forever."

Then Minerva appeared at the door to say that Sam was ready with the carriage.

CHAPTER IV

Aunt Betty

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Aunt Betty

THE next day there was no sign of Adele, though from time to time Jessie looked up from her play to see if her new friend by chance might be coming along the path on the other side of the brook. Sam had delivered the little girl's belongings at the yellow house, and had been told that none of the family were up. Later Jessie's clothes were returned with a note of thanks. So Playmate Polly had it all her own way that day, and Peter Pan was provided with more moss hangings as well as a new ornament in the shape of a bright pink pebble for his grotto. Jessie had told her mother all that she had learned about Adele and had received some information in return. Miss Betty Hallett, Adele's aunt, was a delicate woman, and Adele herself was not strong, so the doctor had declared they would both be better in the country, and as Mr. Hallett had removed his business from the south to the middle states he had discovered in the yellow

house by the brook, just the place which he thought would suit his sister and his little daughter. It was not so far from the city where he had his office but that he could come home frequently to spend Sunday, and it was in a healthful region as well as a very attractive one.

"So now," Mrs. Loomis told Jessie, "I must call on Miss Hallett at once, for we are her nearest neighbors and I am sure she must be lonely."

They set off, therefore, one afternoon, in the little phaeton which Mrs. Loomis always drove herself, and soon they drew up before the yellow house and were ushered into a room filled with stately old furniture and sombre portraits. "I don't think it is as cozy as our house," whispered Jessie.

"Hush, dear," returned Mrs. Loomis. "It is far handsomer, and probably after a while it will look more cheerful. You see everything is not settled."

At this moment Miss Hallett entered and Jessie shrank back against her mother, surprise and something like horror in her eyes, for she saw a tiny little woman with deep dark eyes, a mournful mouth and rather a large head set down be-

tween her shoulders. Jessie had never come in contact with a hunchback before and she gripped her mother's hand hard. Mrs. Loomis gave her fingers a gentle pressure before she rose to meet Miss Hallett whose sudden smile lighted up her sallow face. "I hope we are not coming to you before you are ready to receive a call," said Mrs. Loomis. "We are your nearest neighbors, Miss Hallett, and I hope you will believe that we want to be true ones."

"I am so glad to see you," returned Miss Hallett. "This dull day has given me an attack of the blues, and you could not have chosen a better time for coming. I have been wanting an opportunity to thank you for your kindness to Adele, but we have been so busy, it seemed impossible for me to find time to go anywhere. Adele has talked of nothing else but you and your little girl since her rather awkward tumble. I am afraid she gave you a great deal of trouble."

"Not a bit of it," returned Mrs. Loomis. "I only hope she didn't take cold."

"No, she did not, thanks to your prompt measures. She is an impulsive, headstrong little creature, and I am at loss sometimes just how

to manage her. Fortunately my friend Miss Laurent has consented to come to us, and with her coöperation I hope we shall do great things for Adele. I wanted to have the house all in order before Miss Laurent should come, and it has been such a task."

Jessie wished very much that Miss Hallett would send for Adele instead of talking about her, and presently was relieved when a tall mulatto woman was summoned. "Go tell Miss Adele that she is to come in, Angeline," said Miss Hallett. "Or," she turned to Mrs. Loomis, "perhaps your little girl would rather go out to Adele. She is in the summer-house. My brother has had it enclosed with glass, and Adele rather likes to play there. Would you rather go to Adele?" she asked Jessie.

There was no doubt in Jessie's mind that she would very much prefer this, and in another moment she was following Angeline through the hall to a side door and down a broad walk to the summer-house.

"Young lady to see you, honey baby," said Angeline putting her head in the door.

Adele, who was busy over something in one

corner, turned suddenly and caught sight of Jessie standing on the sill. She darted forward, and flung her arms around her visitor, kissing her first on one cheek and then on the other. "I am so glad you have come," she cried. "I thought you never would. You may go, Angeline." She turned to the tall maid who drew down her mouth and disappeared leaving the little girls alone.

"I thought of course you would come over yesterday, to the play place, you know," returned Jessie.

Adele dropped her eyes and appeared to be looking attentively at her toes. "I couldn't," she said presently.

"Why not?"

"She wouldn't let me."

"What she?"

"Aunt Betty. She's horrid like that sometimes and is just as mean as she can be."

"Is that because she isn't—she isn't just like other people?" asked Jessie hesitatingly. She could readily understand that a person who looked like Miss Hallett might have reason to be disagreeable.

Adele looked at her fixedly for a moment, then to Jessie's great discomfiture she burst into tears. "She isn't! She isn't! She isn't!" she repeated. "She is just like other people and she is dear and good and lovely. You shan't say she is not."

Jessie was bewildered. "I didn't mean—I didn't mean ——" she began helplessly.

"It was I who was horrid," Adele went on. "It was all my doing. I got mad and screamed and fought Angeline and wouldn't eat my supper because I couldn't have coffee and lots, lots, lots of sugar in it, and so Aunt Betty said I shouldn't go to see you till she said I might. She isn't horrid at all, and you shan't say she is. She is perfectly beautiful."

"It wasn't *I* who said she was horrid, you know," said Jessie with an emphasis on the *I*.

"Well, I don't care. You thought so." Adele wiped her eyes and stood thoughtfully picking off the dead leaves from a potted geranium on a shelf near by. Jessie was silent. She hardly knew whether to go or stay.

Presently Adele turned around with the sweetest of smiles. "Let's play," she said.

"I'll show you all my dolls. Why didn't you bring Charity or Peter Pan with you?"

"I will next time," said Jessie, relieved at the turn of affairs, but wondering what kind of girl Adele really was.

"Come," cried Adele, grasping Jessie's hand. "The dolls are all up in the playroom. I was making medicine for them just now. They have *ague*, every blessed one of them, and they are shaking their heads off, at least one of them is," she added with a laugh. "I'll show you which one it is." She pulled Jessie along the boardwalk and up stairs to a pleasant upper room where six dolls were abed, most of them staring smilingly at the ceiling, though two of them had their eyes shut. Adele picked up one of them and showed a very wobbly head which seemed in danger of soon departing from its body. "This is the shakiest one," she said, "and she'll have to have a double dose of medicine. Indeed, I don't know but that she will have to go to a hospital. That is my newest one." She pointed to a very fresh and smiling flaxen-haired beauty.

"What is her name?" asked Jessie.

"She hasn't any in particular. I never name my dolls."

"Oh, don't you?" This seemed as incredible to Jessie as if she had been told that a family of children had been left unnamed. "I don't see how you get along if you don't name them," she said.

"Oh, I scarcely ever play with more than one at a time, and then I can always call that one dolly or honey or something," was the reply.

"I should think you would have to name them," persisted Jessie. "When you are talking about them what do you say?"

"I hardly ever do talk about them. When I do it is to Aunt Betty, and then I say the new doll, or the doll with the brown hair, or something of that kind. Don't let's play with dolls. I bet you can't catch me before I get downstairs." And while Jessie was recovering herself Adele was off and away down the stairs at the foot of which she stood laughing as Jessie descended more slowly. "I think I shall ask Angeline for some cakes," she said. "Come along into the kitchen. I suppose that cross old Roxy wouldn't give us any, but I can coax An-

geline into anything. Angeline! Angeline!" she called imperiously, "come here."

Angeline appeared at the entry door. "I want some cakes," said Adele, "some for Jessie and me. We're hungry."

"Dey ain' no mo' cakes, honey," said Angeline. "Yo done eat 'em all up."

"Then make some right away, or tell Roxy she's got to do it."

"Roxy she done gone to de sto'."

"Oh, bother! You go along and make some, and be quick about it, too," ordered Adele.

"Law, honey chile, how long yuh spec' it tek to mek up de fiah an' bake cake? Yuh foolish, chile. I done got some sweet ertaters in de ashes," she hastened to say as she saw Adele's face puckering up for a cry. "I tell yuh what, honey; I git yuh two nice bowls o' milk an' nice sweet ertaters an' yuh kin tek 'em out in de summah-house an' eat 'em."

"I suppose that will have to do," said Adele with resignation. "Do you like sweet potatoes and milk?" she asked Jessie.

"I never ate any. At least, of course I have

eaten sweet potatoes often enough and I drink milk, but I never ate them together."

"They are mighty good together," Adele assured her. "Bring 'em along, Angeline, to the summer-house, and don't you be forever about it either." And Adele stalked off with Jessie in her wake.

"She's very good-natured, isn't she?" remarked Jessie when they had reached the summer-house.

"Who? Angeline? Oh, so so."

"I wouldn't dare to talk to Minerva that way," said Jessie after a pause.

"You wouldn't? I don't see why. I always talk as I please to Angeline. She nursed my mother and she nursed me, and she doesn't care what I say to her. Besides, I am her mistress." Adele held her head high, and Jessie looked at her admiringly.

"Well," she said, "I suppose that must make a difference; Minerva was never nurse to my mother."

The two bowls of milk and warm sweet potatoes soon appeared and though Jessie did not care very much for the combination, she ate part of her share fearing she might seem rude if she

did not. She was glad, however, that she did not have to finish, and that a message from her mother obliged her to return to the house.

"We must go now, dear," said Mrs. Loomis. "We have made a long call." She smiled at Adele as the two little girls came in.

"Oh, no, you mustn't go," spoke up Adele. "At least, you might let Jessie stay. Won't you, please?"

"Not to-day," said Mrs. Loomis gently. "Your aunt has been kind enough to promise that we may have you to-morrow to spend the day, so I think Jessie and I will have to say good-bye now."

"Oh, am I going for the whole day?" exclaimed Adele delightedly, catching her aunt's hand and pressing her cheek against it as was her way of doing. "Is Angeline going to take me, or can I go alone? I know the way."

"You may go over alone," Miss Betty told her. "But I will send Angeline for you."

Remembering Adele's outburst earlier in the afternoon, Jessie steeled herself to move closer to Miss Hallett and to say, "I'm glad you will let Adele come. I haven't any little girls to play with. you see."

"Oh, yes, you have," put in Adele with mischief in her eyes; "you have Playmate Polly, you know."

Mrs. Loomis looked down with a puzzled expression. "Who in the world is Playmate Polly?" she asked. "I never heard of her."

"She is a horrid creature," said Adele laughing. "She has scraggy hair, and a dreadful rough skin, but Jessie is very fond of her, and I don't like her to be."

Jessie hung her head. She was afraid of being laughed at. "She's only a tree," she said in a low voice.

Miss Betty smiled, but Mrs. Loomis put her arm around her little daughter and said: "Then I am sure she is a very harmless acquaintance, who will set my little girl no bad examples, and I am sure she is much better than no one."

Jessie looked up with a grateful smile. Mother always understood. She would tell her all about Polly now that it was a secret no longer. Yet she felt hurt and offended to think that Adele had not kept faith with her, though, as she reflected, it was not about Polly that her promise was made, but about Peter Pan and his grotto.

Adele knew, however, that Jessie wanted both kept a secret, and so the little visitor threw her hostess a reproachful look which Adele understood and eagerly responded to by saying, "I didn't tell about the other thing, Jessie. Indeed I didn't. Now that you have me, I didn't suppose you would care any more about Polly."

Mrs. Loomis was too considerate to ask about "the other thing," but she was told all about Playmate Polly on the way home, and agreed with Jessie that it was very well to have such an amiable friend when there was danger of a sudden flare up from Adele.

"The poor child has no mother; we must be very patient with her," Mrs. Loomis said. "She has always been a delicate little thing, and in consequence is greatly spoiled. Her aunt is very frail, too, and says she cannot stand scenes. I hope Miss Laurent will have wisdom enough to know how to manage such a wilful little girl. Miss Hallett tells me that her friend is a very superior woman and that she hopes a great deal from her." She was silent for a few minutes while Barney carried them several rods along

the road. Then she said, "What do you think of having lessons with Adele, daughter?"

"Oh! Why, I don't know. I suppose if I have to have lessons at all that it would be nicer than anything. Am I to do it, mother?"

"I think so. I shall have to speak to your father first, but Miss Hallett is very eager to have such an arrangement and brought up the subject herself, so I do not see but that we shall profit by it. She is very anxious that Adele should have a companion, for she has been too much with older persons, and it would certainly settle our difficulty of lessons for you."

This gave Jessie a great deal to think about all that evening, and the last question she asked that night was, "Will you promise to tell me first thing in the morning, mother?"

And her mother answered, "I promise."

CHAPTER V
A New Pet

CHAPTER V

A New Pet

As Mrs. Loomis had said, Miss Hallett's proposition settled the question of lessons for Jessie, and so when Adele appeared the next morning, bright and early, Jessie had the great piece of news to tell her, and Adele responded in her usual tempestuous way by giving Jessie a tremendous hug, and by rushing to Mrs. Loomis to embrace her, too. "It will be perfectly lovely," she cried. "You will come to my house every morning and we'll have lessons in the playroom; it will have to be a workroom then, and in the afternoon we can play by the brook."

"We'll not be able to all winter," said Jessie, "for it will be too cold."

"Oh, I forgot that; we don't have much winter down our way, you know."

"Of course I don't mean that we can never play out-of-doors," returned Jessie, "but it will be too damp down by the brook most of the time, and it will often be too snowy."

"Oh, the snow! I long for it," cried Adele clasping her hands.

"It is nice," said Jessie. "I like to slide on the ice, too, even when it isn't snowy. We can often go out on the little pond when the ice is thick. It is rather fun to be out in the cold at any time, for you feel so good when you come in."

"I shall get Miss Eloise to let me walk home with you sometimes," said Adele, "because you will have to come by yourself in the morning, and it wouldn't be fair for you to walk both ways alone. Does the brook freeze over?"

"Sometimes," Jessie told her, "and then we can cross on the ice. I'd rather go that way always, for it is shorter than to go around by the road, but I suppose I can't in very bad weather."

"What will you do about Polly when it gets cold?" asked Adele.

"Oh, I can always see her except when there is deep snow."

"And the grotto?"

"I'll have to cover it up with brush and it will be there in the spring. Why did you tell my secret, Adele?"

"Because I don't like Polly. I didn't tell

about the grotto, did I? and I think Polly is ugly. I wish you didn't like her."

"Anyhow, she never tells things I don't want her to," said Jessie severely.

Adele buried her head in the sofa cushion of the lounge upon which she was sitting, and began to sob, "I don't care, I don't care. She is nothing but an ugly wicked old tree, and you *shall* love me best, because I love you best. I don't pick out queer bad old creatures like that to love more than you. I believe she is nothing but an old witch."

For a moment Jessie felt quite remorseful, but then a feeling of not wanting to be forced into likes and dislikes took possession of her, and she relentlessly said: "I shall not like you best if you tell my secrets."

"I won't tell any more. 'Deed and 'deed I won't," said Adele, lifting a tear-stained face. "Please love me best, Jessie." She caught Jessie's hands and put them around her own neck looking at her so pleadingly that Jessie's heart melted and she answered: "All right, I'll like you best."

But the words were scarcely out of her mouth

before they were stopped with kisses, and Adele looked as happy as she had looked miserable a moment before. "Now come," she said, "let's go to the grotto. I brought paper dolls; one is Wendy and the other is Tinker Bell. Now you can finish the story, and we'll have a lovely time."

They started off very happily, Mrs. Loomis watching them from the window. "I don't know how it is going to turn out," she said to herself, "but I hope Jessie will learn self-control by seeing how it looks to fly into such tantrums as Adele's. I think the sight of them will do her more good than any amount of precept."

Having given her word that Polly should no more have first place, Jessie was ready to be very amiably disposed toward Adele, yet from nine o'clock in the morning till six in the evening is a long stretch, and it was rather too much to expect that two excitable little girls could spend all that time in one another's company without disagreements. Once during the day Jessie gathered up her dolls and started for home, leaving Adele disconsolately sitting on a stone, but Adele was the first to ask to make up, and begged so hard to be taken back into favor that Jessie yielded.

Once, too, Adele in a sudden rage threatened to demolish the grotto, because Jessie insisted upon having her way with Wendy.

"She's mine," protested Adele.

"I don't care. I know all about her better than you. I saw the play and you didn't," this conclusively.

Adele flung Wendy on the ground and added insult to injury by threatening to chop down Playmate Polly some night. "And when you get up in the morning, she will be gone forever," said Adele.

This was too much for Jessie. "You won't dare to do such a thing," she cried. "I shall tell my father never to let you step your foot on the place again. You can just take your old paper dolls and go home."

Adele arose speechless with rage. She deliberately tore Tinker Bell into bits and threw the pieces at Jessie, then snatching up Wendy she turned toward home.

At once Jessie seemed to hear her mother say: "We must be patient with her; she has no mother." And she was filled with remorse. "Come back, come back," she cried. "I didn't

mean it at all. You can have Wendy do anything you like. And it doesn't matter about Tinker Bell. No one ever sees her anyway, for she's just a little twinkling light. One of the candles will do for her. I'm sorry; I really am, Adele." So peace was made, and the rest of the day passed happily enough.

When they went up to the house for dinner Sam met them. "I've got a new pet for you," he said to Jessie. "Come down to the barn after dinner and I'll show you."

"Oh, what is it? Do tell us," begged Jessie.

But Sam laughed and walked away, so Jessie knew it was no use to question further, for Sam never would be coaxed to tell. She was in great haste to finish her dinner, but Adele was hungry and seemed to enjoy everything so much that Jessie felt that it would not be polite to hurry her. She did not hesitate, however, to urge Adele to make haste as soon as her last mouthful of dessert was swallowed. "Do come right away," she said. "I must see what Sam has. Aren't you wild to know? I am."

"What do you think it is?" said Adele. "Maybe he was only fooling."

"No, I am sure he was in earnest. I know Sam well enough for that. He often brings me things, and I have an idea this is something alive."

The two children were not long in reaching the barn, the big door of which was open. It was a big, roomy place smelling of hay. Three horses stood in their stalls, and as the little girls entered, a brown hen flew cackling from one of the empty mangers. "I'll have Sam get that egg for us," remarked Jessie. "I wonder where he is. Sam! Sam!" she called.

A voice answered from the harness room and Jessie led the way thither. Sam was sitting on a box mending harness. "Here we are," said Jessie. "Show us what you said you had."

"See if you can find it," said Sam, and Jessie immediately set to work to search. She knew all the corners and crannies, if Adele did not. It was quite like a game, and rather an entertaining one. Here they came upon a setting hen who had stolen a nest in the hay; there a squeaking mouse would scuttle across the timbers, scaring both girls into shrieking. At last they made their discovery, for, as they were searching in

front of Barney's stall, directly above their heads something suddenly cried out: "Caw!"

The children looked up to see a black crow looking down at them from a perch in the corner. "Oh, I believe that is it," said Jessie. "Sam! Sam! is it a crow?"

Sam came forward and lifted down the bird which was tethered by a long cord. "Yes," he said. "He is a young one that got a little hurt somehow. I found him in the cornfield. He'll learn to talk after a bit, and I've clipped his wings so he can't fly far. He will get as tame as a dog after a while."

Jessie put a finger on the shining black head of the crow. "Isn't he funny?" she said. "It will be perfectly lovely to have a pet who can talk, and I think you are very good, Sam, to bring him to me. Will he say real words, like people?"

"He won't be quite as glib as a parrot, maybe, but he will say a number of words, and it won't be long before he will be following you everywhere."

"I don't think he is very pretty," remarked Adele, who was standing at one side and did not seem to care about touching the bird.

"Oh, I think he is," returned Jessie. "He is so jetty black, and has such a knowing look. I like him very much. I don't suppose I can keep him in the house, Sam."

"Better not, or he'll be playing havoc with things. He'll soon learn to stay around with the chickens, and when you want to have him near you can tether him. I knew one once that was as good as a watch-dog. Let any one come around day or night and he'd set up his Caw! Caw! I'll take him out-of-doors for you now. He can't get away very far, but I'd better tether him. Where'll you have him?"

"Oh, down by the brook where we play," Jessie told him.

The two little girls led the way and Sam tethered the bird by a long cord. He hopped around contentedly, and soon became tame enough to come quite close to the girls and peck at their feet. "Polly can take care of him, you see," said Jessie. "I think she rather likes birds, at least I've seen her holding them quite often."

Adele laughed. "You do say such ridiculous things about Polly."

Jessie paid no attention to this remark but

continued her line of thought. "I think she misses my playing with her as much as I used to, so I'll tell her she can play with the crow all she likes. I wonder what we'd better call him. He's as shiny and black as coal; you know the kind that has all sorts of colors in it. He looks that way when he turns his head."

"I don't think Coal would be a very pretty name," objected Adele.

"I don't think so either," Jessie agreed with her. "I'll have to think of something else." They turned over in their minds all the things that suggested blackness or darkness, from ink to thunder-clouds, finally hitting upon Ebony, which was a happy thought of Jessie's who remembered an ebony chest in her Aunt Lucy's house. "We can call him Ebon for short," she said. "It is a nice, easy name."

"And Eb would be still shorter," said Adele. "Hello, Eb."

The crow responded by putting his head to one side and remarking "Caw!" in a way which made both girls laugh.

"When I get the gray kitten," said Jessie, "I shall have two new pets."

"And I haven't any," said Adele wistfully.

"I am sure Effie Hinsdale would give you one of the kittens," said Jessie. "I'll ask mother if we can go there Saturday. I know she will be glad—Effie I mean—to get a good home for another kitten. There is a gray something like mine and two black ones."

"I'd rather have black, I think, and I'll call it Velvet," said Adele swift in decision.

"I've named mine Cloudy," Jessie told her. "We can't have them yet, you know."

"Why not?"

"They're not big enough to leave their mother. I thought I saw a cat, a yellow cat, on your porch one morning."

"Oh, that's the stable cat. He is very wild and won't let me come near him. I'd rather have a kitten anyway."

"Well, we can go see the kittens at Effie's even if we can't take them just yet, and we shall have the crow."

"And Polly," put in Adele with a laugh.

"She isn't a pet; she is a friend," replied Jessie with some dignity, feeling that Adele meant to underrate Playmate Polly's importance.

In a very short time Ebon had become quite tame, and followed the little girls as if he were a dog. He constantly amused them by his funny ways. Although he had not yet learned to talk, Sam declared that he would in time, and meanwhile Adele went with Jessie to see Effie's kittens, and was promised a black one. So from having no companions at all, Jessie felt that she would be very well supplied that winter. "There will be you and your kitten, me and my kitten, Polly and Eb," she said to Adele. "That will be a great many of us to play together."

"Yes, and there will be Miss Eloise and horrid lessons," returned Adele.

Jessie sighed. "Yes," she said, "I have been thinking of that. I wish we could take lessons like pills and have done with them."

"In jelly?"

"No, I'd just gulp them down with water and have some bread and jelly afterward."

The children were in the sitting-room, having just returned from Effie's. Mrs. Loomis was sitting there sewing. She smiled as she listened to what the children were saying. "I think you

will be doing just about as you say," she remarked. "You will swallow down your lessons in the morning, and in the afternoon you will have your bread and jelly in the shape of play. I don't believe you will find the lessons such a terrible dose as you think."

"Indeed, I hope so," returned Jessie with a sigh. "Come on, Adele; Peter Pan has lost his shadow again and I must find it." This Peter Pan of Jessie's lost his shadow much more frequently than did the original one, for the shadow was nothing but a bit of newspaper fastened by a piece of thread and it was torn off very often.

"I'm going to have a Peter Pan, too," Adele announced triumphantly. "Aunt Betty has written papa to bring me one the next time he comes."

"There couldn't be two Peter Pans," said Jessie in an annoyed tone.

"There could, too. I am sure I have just as much right to name my doll after the Peter Pan as you have. There are hundreds and hundreds of George Washingtons in the world and lots and lots of Grover Clevelands."

Jessie could not deny this, but she was not

pleased with the idea of there being another Peter Pan so close at hand. "If you name your doll Peter Pan, I'll call mine something else," she said, and then she added, "I won't have any use for the grotto, of course, so I will just pull it down."

"I think you are horrid mean," said Adele. "You know I do love that grotto."

"Well, you can make one for yourself," said Jessie calmly. "There's just as much stuff for it on your side of the brook as there is on mine."

The tears rushed to Adele's eyes. "You know I couldn't. I should never know how, and besides your side of the brook has a much better bank."

"Well," said Jessie, unmoved, "there simply cannot be two Peter Pans."

Adele snatched up her hat and ran from the room. Jessie, watching her from the window rather shamefacedly, saw her hurrying down the hill. She waited till Adele had safely crossed the log, then she turned away saying to herself, "There couldn't possibly be two Peter Pans."

CHAPTER VI

A Mystery

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A Mystery

LIKE most of their quarrels this between the two little girls did not last long, for the next morning Jessie had scarcely finished breakfast before Adele appeared eager and smiling. "Papa came last night," she said, "and so did Miss Eloise."

"Then are we to begin taking our pills to-day?" asked Jessie.

Adele laughed. "No, not till to-morrow. Aunt Betty and Miss Eloise want to talk, and besides Aunt Betty says Miss Eloise is tired and she mustn't begin to work right away."

"I thought we were the ones who had to work," remarked Jessie.

"Don't you suppose it is going to be just as hard for Miss Eloise?" put in Mrs. Loomis. "Do you imagine it is going to be very amusing to be shut up with two wilful little girls who don't like lessons?"

"Oh!" Jessie had never thought of this side of the question. She looked at Adele.

"Oh," said Adele. Then after a pause. "But she doesn't have to do it if she doesn't want to, and we do have to."

"Do you think all persons who do their duty in this world really prefer not to do some other thing?" asked Mr. Loomis. "Some persons like to teach, I admit, but there are many who have to learn to like teaching just as much as you will have to learn to like studying. So don't imagine it will be all fun for Miss Laurent. From what I can learn Miss Eloise consented to be your teacher because she is a loyal friend, and as your Aunt Betty, Adele, dreaded the thought of having a stranger in the house, Miss Eloise consented to come. She fortunately has a gift for teaching, but she is willing to come to this little country village because she can be of use to Miss Hallett, and because she thinks she can help you little girls. I hope both of you will remember that, and that you will do nothing to make her sorry that she decided to come."

This very serious way of taking it made the two little girls feel quite subdued. Adele was

first to recover her spirits. "You don't know what I've got," she sang out as she held something in her hand behind her.

"Let me see," cried Jessie springing toward her. Adele backed away.

"Guess," she said.

Jessie shook her head. "Can't."

"Something papa brought me."

"Oh, I know; a doll."

Adele displayed her new possession. "Yes, but I am not going to call it Peter Pan, at least, not yet a while, for it is smaller than yours. I don't say I never will, but now I am going to name it after papa."

"What is his name?" asked Jessie.

"James. I shall call my doll Jamie. Come on, let's go down to the grotto. I wish now I hadn't asked for a boy doll; if it had been a girl one I could have called it Wendy instead of the paper one. Do you know, Jessie, Miss Eloise says that Peter Pan's house was in the tree tops."

"So it was," Jessie remembered.

"But I like the grotto better," declared Adele.

"Aren't you ready to go?"

"We can't go yet; the grass is too wet. We'll

have to wait till the sun dries it a little. We can play in here for a while."

Jessie had not been very enthusiastic over the new doll though she was relieved that it was not exactly like her own, and that Adele had decided to call it Jamie. The doll wore a scarlet coat with tiny brass buttons upon it, white trousers and a little red cap. He was quite a pretty little fellow, and Jessie admired him, though she did not say so. When the sun had dried the grass enough the children set forth, Ebon hopping behind them, sometimes taking a short flight with flapping wings. It was a bright autumn morning, the sky very blue and the air pleasant.

"I'm so glad it isn't raining," remarked Adele, "for it is our last morning."

"Except Saturday. We shall not study on Saturdays, shall we?"

"Oh, no, of course not."

They had reached the foot of the hill, and Adele made straight for the grotto, but Jessie stopped in front of the little Polly Willow. "Good-morning, Polly," she said, gently patting the rough bark.

Adele watched her, and then said mockingly, "Good-morning, old Polly." Then she exclaimed, "I know what I'm going to do; I'm going to have a house for my Peter Pan, and I am going to build it on Polly's head."

"Indeed you shall not," replied Jessie. "She is mine and I shall not let you. Besides you said you weren't going to call your doll Peter Pan."

"I said I wasn't at first."

"This is at first."

"No, it was at first when I said that; now it is after a while."

Jessie turned her back on Adele and it seemed as if their last evening's quarrel would break out afresh.

"Are you mad, Jessie?" questioned Adele.

No answer.

"Are you, Jessie?"

"Yes, I am." The reply came in offended tones. "You know I don't like you to make fun of Polly."

"Then say you like me best."

"I have said that."

"But do you really mean it?"

"Ye-es," rather reluctantly. "At least I do when you don't do me so mean."

"I won't have the house on Polly's head then. I'll take this high bush." She set the scarlet-coated little figure in a bush close by. "He looks like some red flower there, doesn't he? I'm going to get something to build the house with."

"What kind of things?"

"Oh, leaves and moss and things."

"Then I'll stay here and get the grotto in order," Jessie decided.

"I'm going to make a cradle for Peter Pan," said Adele as she moved off.

Jessie did not follow, but busied herself in sweeping up, with a bunch of twigs, the bits of earth which had fallen down over night upon the floor of the cave, and in putting the moss into place. Ebon, hopping about, regarded her with his bright eyes, and coming nearer tried to peck at the shining piece of glass which made the lake in the centre of the grotto. "Go away, Eb," cried Jessie. "You are getting too fusty entirely." She shoved him away with her elbow, and he strutted off dipping his head and uttering some protesting caws. After a few minutes

Jessie had the grotto in pretty good order, but concluded a few more pebbles would not come amiss. These must be found in the brook. The water was very clear, and in the shallow parts one could easily get at the pebbles lying at the bottom of the stream. There was a scraggy tree trunk at the water's edge, and on this Jessie sat, holding on to one gnarly root while she reached over to get the pebbles. Brown leaves went drifting by on the stream; a Bob White called from the grass near by. Jessie nodded understandingly to Playmate Polly. "You like it, don't you, Polly, or you wouldn't stay here. The idea of any one's building a house on your head. I shall put your hat on and then you will be able to show that you are not just an ordinary tree. But now I must take back my pebbles."

She gathered up the little stones and returned to the grotto where she went on with her paving till she heard Adele's voice saying: "I have some beauty leaves all red and yellow, and I found some moss, too." Then an exclamation:

"Why, where is my Peter Pan? Jessie Loomis, you have hidden him just to tease me."

"'Deed I have not," returned Jessie. "I have been getting pebbles from the brook."

"I put him right here on top of this bush," said Adele, "and he's gone, so you must have taken him. You did it on purpose just because you didn't want me to have a Peter Pan."

"I did not," returned Jessie indignantly. "He could easily have fallen off. Look all around, in the grass and the leaves."

"Has Mrs. Mooky been here?" asked Adele. "You know that story of the little Tom Thumb that the cow was going to eat."

"I believe Mrs. Mooky was somewhere about," Jessie told her. "No," she remembered, "it wasn't near here that I saw her; it was on the other side of the fence in the pasture."

Adele began to hunt around diligently, Jessie joining in the search, but no lost doll was to be found. Once a bunch of scarlet berries on a bush deceived them into thinking that by some mysterious means the doll had been spirited away. "For you know he could fly," said Adele.

At last they were obliged to give up looking, and Adele went home quite convinced that Jessie knew where the doll was hidden, and Jessie, in

her turn went off up the hill toward the house, hurt and distressed to think that Adele should not have believed her.

She went back after dinner to renew the search, and became satisfied after a long hunt that Adele had mistaken the bush and that she had put it somewhere else. A hollow stump in the neighborhood seemed the most likely place, but though she managed to climb up where she could peep into the hollow, it was all dark within and a stick poked in did nothing more than scare a chipmunk nearly out of his wits, so that presently he came out chattering and bristling with rage and fear. Jessie went home and told her mother all about it, and after Mrs. Loomis had gone with her to see what she could do, they both concluded that the doll must have fallen far down into this same hollow stump, and that it could not be found unless the stump were grubbed up.

"Do you think I ought to give her my Peter Pan?" Jessie asked hesitatingly. "I like him best of all my dolls except Charity."

"No, I don't think you need do that," her mother told her, "but when I go to town I will

try to find one that you can give her to replace this."

"May I tell her so?"

"Yes, if you like. I think if you do it will convince her that you spoke the truth."

"She ought to have believed me anyhow."

"Circumstances were against you, my dear. I know it is very hard to be suspected, but there was some reason for Adele's doing so, and I am sure she will be satisfied when you tell her she is to have another doll."

"May I go over now and tell her?"

"Yes, if you won't stay too long."

Jessie set off toward the brook. She did not fail to search for the doll as she went, but she stopped to lay her hand upon Playmate Polly and to say: "You would have believed me, Polly. You always do believe me, and I don't think I shall ever tell Adele again that I like her best."

Playmate Polly made no answer, but the murmuring brook sang a little song that Jessie liked and the whispering trees seemed to say: "We know, we know." The same little chipmunk was sitting on his haunches on top of the

hollow stump. He chattered fiercely as he saw Jessie, and leaping into the nearest pine tree went whisking off. Jessie was not sure but she liked her favorite playground better without the presence of Adele, and she almost wished the yellow house were still empty. It seemed as if she and Adele were continually at odds, and though Adele professed to care very much for her, she didn't see how it were possible when she doubted her word.

She went rather slowly through the piece of woods and through the orchard which lay on the other side of the brook. She realized that now she would meet Miss Eloise, and though she wanted much to see what manner of person she was, she rather dreaded the meeting, and besides she really did not feel in a very friendly mood toward Adele just then, only she could not have her go on believing untrue things. At last she came out close to the garden fence. She stood still for a moment before she opened the gate and went through. There was no one about, but she heard voices from the front porch, and as she turned the corner of the house she saw that there were four persons on

the porch, Miss Betty, a strange lady with fair hair who must be Miss Eloise, a man who was probably Adele's father, and Adele herself. Jessie paused where she stood but Adele had heard the click of the gate and had caught sight of the visitor.

"There she is now," cried Adele. "Have you found him, Jessie? Have you found him?"

Jessie came slowly forward. "No," she said shyly. "Mother helped me to look. We think he must have fallen down into a hollow stump and has gone way down inside, but mother says she is going to town very soon and she will get you another doll just like it."

Miss Betty was listening. "Indeed she must not do that, Jessie," she said. "A little cheap doll like that is no loss, besides it was not you who lost it, but Adele, and her father can easily get another when he goes back to the city."

"But," Jessie hesitated, then she turned to Miss Betty. "I want mother to get it so Adele will believe I spoke the truth, that I don't tell stories." Jessie held her head high.

Miss Betty looked at Adele. "Why, honey,"

she said, "I am sure you never told Jessie that she wasn't truthful."

Adele nodded. "Hm, hm, I did, because I thought she might have hidden the doll to tease me and because she didn't want me to have a Peter Pan."

"But she has proved that she does want you to have one by asking her mother to replace the one that is lost, and besides, you told me that you were the last one that had the doll."

Adele rushed at Jessie and flung her arms around her. "Wasn't I horrid?" she said. "I'll believe every word you say after this. I suppose you will say," she whispered, "that Polly always has believed you."

"Yes," Jessie nodded, "she certainly does."

"I don't care," returned Adele defiantly. "I believe after all that she is a thief, and that she stole my doll."

"What are you talking about?" asked Miss Betty. "You both look as fierce as turkey-cocks."

"I'm talking about that old Polly," answered Adele.

"You absurd children!" said Miss Betty laughing. "Come, Jessie, don't you want to meet your

teacher? She is very anxious to meet you. Eloise, dear, this is your other little pupil."

Jessie was conscious of a pair of gray eyes that looked at her very steadily but very kindly, and of two warm hands that held hers, but she was overcome with shyness and said not a word.

"Do you think you are going to like her more than you do me?" Adele asked Miss Eloise anxiously.

"You jealous little monkey," said her aunt. "Why shouldn't she like Jessie best? Don't you want her to?"

"I want her to like us both alike," replied Adele.

"A perfectly safe reply," said Miss Eloise. "I hope I have a place in my heart big enough for both of you, my dears."

"This is papa," said Adele swinging Jessie around in front of Mr. Hallett, who held out his hand.

"I hope you and this will-o'-the-wisp of ours will be good friends," he said to Jessie. "She needs some one to tone her down a little, and keep her from having tantrums." He softly patted Adele's hand as he spoke.

"Jessie has tantrums, too," spoke up Adele, "but they are pouty ones, not screamy like mine."

Jessie blushed and felt greatly embarrassed. She wished Adele were not quite so outspoken.

"Never mind, dear," said Miss Eloise leaning over and putting her arm around Jessie. "If we don't all have tantrums we all feel like it sometimes, and when we were little girls very few of us did not have them. We generally outgrew them, or learned self-control, and that is what you and Adele will do."

Jessie looked up gratefully and from that moment liked Miss Eloise.

So soon did this lady put her at her ease that in a few minutes she found herself talking quite glibly about her home, her pets, and her reasons for leaving school, realizing that she would not in the least mind having lessons the next day. But presently she remembered that she was not to stay too long, so she took her leave, Adele calling after her: "Remember, you are not to get another doll. I won't let you, and I'd rather have a Wendy anyhow."

CHAPTER VII

Taking Pills

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IT was with rather mixed feelings that Jessie set out the next morning to begin lessons with Miss Eloise. She didn't enjoy the idea of studying, but she did like Miss Eloise and it would be quite a novelty to have but one other schoolmate. She felt rather important, too, from the fact that she was to begin French and music. This last thought gave confidence to her step and brightness to her face when she appeared on the porch of the yellow house.

Adele danced out to meet her. "We're all ready," she said. "Miss Eloise and I have been fixing up the schoolroom, and we have put flowers in there so it looks very nice. We are to have a table between us, you and I. You shall choose which end you like best and I will take the other. Elle est ici, mademoiselle," she called out when they reached the top of the stairs, and

Jessie suddenly remembered that Adele knew French almost as well as English, and she felt herself very ignorant.

However, Miss Eloise gave her such a cordial greeting, and the schoolroom was so bright and cheery that she soon forgot everything but her interest in choosing which end of the table she preferred, and in looking at the books Miss Eloise had piled up. They were all fresh and new and Jessie liked new books. "I don't know a word of French," she said when she had seated herself.

"You need not say that very long," said Miss Eloise.

"She need not say it five minutes from now," put in Adele. "She can begin with *Bon jour*, can't she, Miss Eloise? Say *Bon jour*, Jessie."

Jessie obediently repeated the words.

"Now you can say good-day," Adele told her, "and you can't say any more that you don't know a word of French." Then she turned to Miss Eloise and chatted away volubly for a minute or two while Jessie listened and wondered if she would ever be so glib with a foreign tongue.

"I think I will make a rule that you are to speak to each other only in French during lesson hours," said Miss Eloise. "That will give you both a chance and Jessie will be surprised how soon she will be able to understand and speak a number of words. Now we will start in with something else. Come here, Jessie, and show me how far you have gone in arithmetic and how well you can spell."

It turned out that Jessie was far ahead of Adele in these studies, but that the latter knew more history and had a smattering of a number of other things which Jessie knew nothing about. But after a while Miss Eloise managed to arrange classes for them, dropping some of Adele's studies, which did not seem necessary for the present, and adding some to Jessie's list. But they had hardly settled down to real work before it was time for a morsel of lunch and a fifteen minutes' run out-of-doors.

"I don't think those were very bad pills to take," said Jessie as the two sat munching their apples on the porch steps.

"They will be worse after a while, I suppose," said Adele. "Wait till you have to sit at the

piano and practice stupid exercises half an hour at a time. You won't like that one bit."

"I suppose not," returned Jessie with a sigh. "But you don't have to do that all the time, do you? You will have pieces after a while."

"Oh, after a fashion, but they are not what I call tunes," she said scornfully.

This sounded very discouraging, but Jessie was not going to give up hope. "Maybe some teachers do that way," she said, "but I don't believe Miss Eloise will."

"Wait and see," returned Adele with a wise shake of the head.

The tinkle of a little bell took them indoors to lessons again, and the next hour or two passed quickly, and to Jessie's surprise very pleasantly. "It is much nicer than going to the Hill School," she told her mother. "I know a whole lot of French and some of my notes on the piano. When I know them all am I going to have a piano, mother?"

"Not at present," Mrs. Loomis told her. "You are to practice on Adele's piano for a while. Pianos are rather expensive things and we shall

have to save up a lot of eggs and butter before we can buy one."

"Adele is richer than I am, isn't she, mother?"

"In some things, perhaps, but she has no mother nor brothers."

Jessie threw her arms around her mother's neck and gave her a mighty hug. "And you are worth all the money in the world," she said. "My two brothers are pretty far away, but I do see them sometimes, and that's much better than not having any at all. Yes, I believe I am much richer than Adele. She hasn't any pets either. Where is Eb, mother?"

"Oh, my dear, I don't know. He is out-of-doors somewhere. We cannot have him in the house very often, for he gets into so much mischief."

Jessie went out to find Eb, but not seeing him near, she concluded to go to Playmate Polly and tell her all about her morning at the yellow house, for Polly was always a good listener. It was rather pleasant, too, to feel free to do exactly as she liked after the restriction of a morning in the schoolroom.

She was sitting on a big rock talking quietly

in an undertone to Polly, when with a whoop and a hallo two boys came vaulting over the fence and rushed toward her. For a moment Jessie was so startled that she could give only little shrieks, but these soon changed to a squeal of delight when she discovered the two intruders to be her brothers, Max and Walter. "Oh! oh!" she cried. "Where did you come from, and how do you happen to be home to-day?"

"Why, it is just a piece of luck for us," said Max catching her up and kissing her. "One of the boys, Carl Potter, is ill with something, the doctor doesn't know just what yet, and so he thought we boys had better come home for a few days till he finds out whether it is diphtheria or not. Of course I don't mean it is luck for old Carl, but it gives us a holiday."

"I hope it isn't diphtheria," said Jessie sympathetically, "though it is nice to have you home; it does seem so quiet without you. I have a thousand things to tell you."

"Fire away," said Max.

"Well, I don't go to the Hill School any more, but I have lessons with Adele—she lives in the

yellow house, you know. I know some French *Bon jour, monsieur. Comme portez vous ?* ”

“Pshaw!” interrupted Walter. “I can beat that with Latin.”

“Let’s hear you,” said Jessie.

“Stop your fooling,” put in Max. “Don’t be such a blower, Walter. I know just about how much Latin you know. Never mind him, Jess, go on.”

“I have begun music, too,” Jessie turned to her elder brother, “and some day I shall have a piano when mother can save enough butter and eggs to get me one.”

“That will be fine,” said Max encouragingly.

“Then you don’t see old Ezra any more,” said Walter, “and can’t tell us anything about the trains and the engines.”

“No.” Jessie shook her head. “I haven’t been to see him. He had rheumatism, and I fell on the track one day; that’s why I stopped going to school. There is a cross man in Ezra’s place and I don’t like him.”

“I say, that’s too bad,” said Max. “Old Ezra is always so good-natured about letting you flag trains and things.”

"I've got a crow," suddenly exclaimed Jessie, "and his name is Eb. That's short for Ebony. He doesn't talk yet, but he is going to, Sam says. I think he must be up in the barn. Come, and I'll show him to you. I have a new friend, too. Her name is Adele Pauline Falaise Hallett, and she lives in the yellow house."

"Mother wrote to us that the yellow house was taken," said Walter. "I'm sorry, for now we fellows can't go there and play in that empty barn like we used to."

"I thought Effie Hinsdale was your best friend," said Max to his sister.

"Effie is a friend, of course, but she lives across the railroad, and I can't go to see her unless some one goes with me. Besides, she has a new friend, too; a girl named Anna Sharp that has come to the neighborhood, so Effie don't mind being second best. She has a gray kitten that is to be mine when it is big enough."

"Girls are always so crazy about cats and kittens," said Walter scornfully. "I'd much rather have the crow."

"Well, you can't have him. Sam brought him to me," returned Jessie a little sharply. Boys

were entirely too fond of making slighting remarks about girls, she thought.

"Oh, keep your old crow," returned Walter. "No doubt you'll be glad enough to get rid of him some day."

"Why?" asked Jessie.

"Wait and see," replied Walter mysteriously. "Say, Max, let's go see old Ezra. Maybe he is all right now, and I want to know about the trains. We'll see enough of the old crow, and it is a good time to go to Ezra's."

"I want to go, too," said Jessie.

"Well, you can't," returned Walter. "We don't want girls tagging everywhere we go."

"Oh, let her come," put in Max. "You might be a little more decent to her the first day you get home. You can come, Jess." Max was the eldest and Walter generally accepted his lead, so Jessie put her hand confidingly in her big brother's and they set out. She thought Walter was very disagreeable to speak to her as he did when he had been separated from her all these weeks, and she took pains not to address a word to him on the way. She chatted to Max, however talking of the things she knew would in-

terest him: the change in the schedule, how 589 was very late one day, and how she had flagged a train one afternoon, how 248 had a hot box one morning so it had to stop on a siding. When Walter put eager questions to her she simply gave him a dignified stare and went on talking to Max. Her triumph was complete when they arrived at the crossing to find that Ezra was back again at his post and that his best greeting was for the little girl.

"Well, well, well," he exclaimed, "here you are at last. I certainly have missed you, little girl. Not going to school any more? I was afraid you might be sick. Been watching for ye every day since I got over my rheumatiz. When you going to start again? Hallo, boys." He gave a nod to each, but it was plain to see that it was Jessie who had the warmest welcome.

"I've stopped going to school," Jessie told him. "You weren't here, you know, Ezra, so father and mother were afraid to have me cross the track. I tripped and fell one day when the train was coming."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Ezra. "Sykes never told me of that. I was in such misery I couldn't

think about much else but my pains for a while. You don't say you ain't going back at all?"

"Not this winter," Jessie told him. "I am studying with Adele Hallett at the yellow house."

"They're new folks, ain't they? Well, I certainly am sorry to lose the sight of ye every day. It is too bad Sykes had to take my place or ye might be mounting the hill every morning just the same as usual. Father knew I'd look out for ye, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes. He said as long as you were there he didn't have any fear, even if the trains were changed. But after I fell that day when the train was coming, mother said she would never feel easy again."

"Too bad, too bad. I am sorry." Ezra took off his cap and wiped his bald head with a red handkerchief. He was a little wrinkled-faced old man with mild blue eyes. He wore a little fringe of beard under his chin, and his pleasant mouth always widened to a smile for his friends. "Right warm day for October, ain't it?" he said pulling up his stool which stood by the door of the little house. "Wish I had more chairs to

offer ye. Guess ladies will have to come first." He waved Jessie to the stool.

"Oh, no." Jessie refused the proffered seat. "We'd rather you'd sit there, Ezra. The boys and I can do just as well with these railroad ties that are piled up here. Has 589 gone by yet?"

Ezra took out his watch. "She's due in just five minutes. I thought I heard her whistling for Boyds a while ago. She's on time to-day."

"May I hold the flag?" said Jessie eagerly. "It has been such a long time since I did."

"To be sure ye may," returned Ezra, taking the flag from where it stood leaning against the door. "Yes, I thought so; she's whistling for the cut."

So far Jessie had monopolized the conversation and now Walter spoke up. "Have they put on any new engines, Ezra?"

He shook his head. "No, Leander still runs old 61 and keeps her shining."

"Any accidents?" asked Max.

"Glad to say ther hain't. Come near being one down by Millersville the other day."

"Tell us about it."

"Have to wait till 589 has went by. Here,

honey," he turned to Jessie. "Get up and be all ready. She'll whistle in a minute for our crossing."

Jessie took her place on the stool set for her, flag in hand, Ezra standing close by, and presently there was a shrill whistle and next the train flew by.

"It is so exciting," said Jessie turning a beaming face to her brothers.

"Humph!" exclaimed Walter in rather a dissatisfied way. He did not like it that Jessie should be having all the fun. "What about the accident?" he said turning to Ezra.

"There wasn't none."

"Well, I mean the one that nearly was."

Ezra launched forth into an account of how the freight train from the west was on the track and a special was behind her. Somehow Bill Downs didn't get the orders clear and backed into a siding just in time to avoid a crash. "Reversed, sir," said Ezra. "Heard the special whistle at the cut and put on steam so he reached the siding in time to back. If he'd been a second later all would have been up."

The children listened attentively. Bill Downs

was a familiar figure to them, and his engine an old acquaintance, so his escape was of momentous interest.

After a little more railroad gossip the boys concluded it was time to return, as the sun was setting and the short afternoon was nearly over. "Come again, come again," said Ezra, his eyes on Jessie who waved her hand to him till a turn in the road hid him from sight.

"I wish I had taken him some apples," she said. "His trees have hardly any on them this year, and he is so fond of them."

"We'll take some to him to-morrow," said Walter importantly. "You needn't bother."

"I thought of it first," said Jessie, not liking to have her ideas taken possession of in this style.

"That makes no difference," returned Walter. "The few you could carry wouldn't do much good. Max and I can take a big basketful."

Jessie did not answer, but she determined to carry out her plan if she could. If going away to school made Walter like this she didn't think it was doing him much good. The boys left her at the first gate for they caught sight of their

father in a field near by, and joined him, so Jessie went up to the house alone. She sought her mother immediately. "Mother," she said, "I wish you would send Walter to another school."

"Why, my dear," returned Mrs. Loomis, looking up with a smile.

"Because he's so—so—he has such a contemptibleness for girls since he's been away. He used not to care when I wanted to go with him and Max, and now he is at home again he just wants to put me down all the time. I said I wanted to take some apples to Ezra, and he says he is going to. I thought of it first, mother, and Ezra has been so good to me. Couldn't you let Sam go with me to-morrow morning, and carry a big basketful, bigger than Walter and Max could carry?"

Mrs. Loomis was thoughtful for a moment. She realized that Walter had no right to set aside Jessie's little plan, so she said, "I am afraid Sam cannot be spared, but I will tell you what can be done. I have to go to Mrs. Traill's to-morrow morning, and you could go as far as the crossing with me. We can carry a big basket of apples in the phaeton and leave them for Ezra,

then you can go on to your lessons from there."

"Oh, lovely!" cried Jessie. "You always do think of just the right thing, mother. Will you tell Walter we are going to take the apples?"

"Yes, and I think it is right that you should be the one to go with them, for we appreciate very much his kindness to you."

No more was said then, but at the supper table Mrs. Loomis told her husband what had been arranged and asked him to select a lot of their finest apples for the basket. Jessie gave Walter a triumphant look across the table. He answered by making a mouth at her, but she did not care as she had her mother on her side.

"Sneaky thing," whispered Walter as she passed him after supper.

"Sneaky yourself," returned Jessie. "I told mother how horrid you were."

"Tattletale," returned Walter. "Just like a girl."

This time Jessie had no words except the expressive exclamation "Pff!" given with a most contemptuous toss of the head.

CHAPTER VII

Dapple Gray

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Dapple Gray

THE rest of the time that the boys were at home Jessie did not see much of them. She found so many things to interest her at the yellow house, that she enjoyed the novelty of it, and moreover, when she was there she was free from Walter's teasing, so she spent most of her time with Adele, to the latter's delight.

The afternoon of the day when the apples were taken to Ezra, the two little girls sought their playground by the brook, but Max and Walter discovered them, and as they did not want their secrets known, they quickly covered up the grotto and beat a hasty retreat across the brook. "I don't mind Max so much," Jessie explained, "though even he teases sometimes, but Walter is such a worry when he sets out to be, and if he knew about Playmate Polly and Peter Pan's grotto he would be sure to do something to them just to pay me back for taking the apples. So

we will play in your garden or the summer-house. I will take Charity and you can get one of your dolls."

"The back porch is a good place," returned Adele. "I am sorry your brothers aren't nice and I am glad I haven't any."

"But they are nice," returned Jessie on the defensive. "They are very nice. All boys tease and Max was lovely the other day when I wanted to go with them. He is older than Walter. I suppose that is the reason. Since Walter has been going to boarding-school he thinks himself so smart."

The two little girls trudged up the hill toward the yellow house and as they entered the garden they heard some one calling, "Adele! Adele! where are you?"

"That's Aunt Betty," said Adele. "I wonder what she wants."

"Let's go see," returned Jessie.

They ran around the corner of the house. Miss Betty and Miss Eloise were both on the front porch. By the steps was standing a little gray pony harnessed to a small pony cart. "Oh, dear, company, I suppose," said Adele disgustedly.

"I wish we'd stayed away. I suppose now I shall have to be kissed and called a sweet child."

"I wonder who it is," said Jessie more curious. "That turnout does not belong to any one around here. I know just what every one drives. Effie Hinsdale's mother has a white horse; the minister's wife drives a sorrel; Mrs. Traill has two black horses and——"

But she went no further for Miss Betty had seen the two children and was calling out, "Come here, dears, such a lovely surprise for you! Whose do you think that is, Adele?"

"I'm sure I don't know. It isn't the cousins from the city, is it, Aunt Bet?" said Adele.

"No." Miss Betty shook her head. "It belongs to the cousin of the cousins from the city."

Adele looked bewildered. "Who is that?"

Miss Betty laughed. "Who is your cousins' cousin? Don't you know?"

"Aunt Betty, you don't mean me!" cried Adele. "It isn't mine. It couldn't possibly be."

"That is exactly whose it is," Miss Betty told her. "Your father has sent it to you for a birthday gift."

"But my birthday is past and gone."

"That is true. He couldn't get what he wanted at once, so he had to wait, and so your present has just arrived."

Adele rushed forward and clasped the pony's neck. "Oh, you dear beautiful thing," she cried. "I love you. Oh, Jessie, isn't he a beauty?"

Jessie could but agree that he certainly was.

"And can I drive him myself?" asked Adele eagerly.

"When you learn how," she was told.

"I can drive," declared Jessie. "I often drive when I am out with mother."

"Your father says he is very gentle," remarked Miss Eloise to Adele.

"Then couldn't we try him now?" begged Adele.

"Couldn't Jessie drive him just a little way to see how he goes?"

Miss Betty looked at Miss Eloise. "Do you think it would be safe?" she said.

"Can you really drive, Jessie?" asked Miss Eloise.

"I truly can," Jessie told her. "I often drive all the way. I can turn out for the big teams

and I can drive in through the gates as straight as anything."

"Then you may jump in and show us what you can do," Miss Betty consented, and the little girls were not slow in obeying.

"How far may we go?" asked Jessie taking up the reins.

"Oh, not out of sight. Just up and down the road where we can see you," Miss Betty directed.

Jessie proudly turned the pony's head toward the gate, drove through without accident, and soon the little pony was trotting up the road. Miss Betty and Miss Eloise came to the gate to watch. Jessie turned carefully and brought the pony back in triumph.

"Can't she drive well?" said Adele admiringly. "She is going to teach me, and when she isn't here to do it Otto can." Otto was the Halletts' man. "What shall I name him, Aunt Betty?"

"Why not call him Dapple Gray?" suggested Miss Eloise.

"Good! That will just suit him, but I shall never lend him to a lady to ride him far away. Oh, no, we don't want to get out yet."

"But the little pony must be tired. He has come a long distance to-day."

That put another face upon the matter and Adele was quite willing that Jessie should give up the reins to Otto who led Dapple Gray to the stable.

"I never knew such lovely things as happen nowadays," said Adele as she and Jessie returned to the garden. "First I met you and we had the lovely plays down by the brook, then came Eb, and now this dear Dapple Gray! Before I came here weeks and weeks used to go by and nothing at all happened. I do hope we can go driving every day by ourselves; it would be such fun."

Within a week Adele had learned to manage her pony pretty well, and the two little girls were allowed to take a short drive each day, not going out of sight of the house, but in time Adele tired of this and was bent upon going farther. She begged and entreated till Miss Betty was on the point of yielding, and at last agreed to take a longer drive than usual in her own carriage that Adele and Jessie might follow in the pony cart. This satisfied Adele for a

week, but there came a day when Miss Betty had one of her severe headaches, and Miss Eloise was not willing to leave her, so the two little girls were told they could take their drive alone, but must not go out of sight.

They started off contentedly enough, but soon Adele became tired of the monotonous drive up and down in front of the house. "Miss Eloise is with Aunt Betty and I know she isn't thinking about us," she said. "We may just as well go a little further and she will never know. It is so silly to go up and down, up and down, this stupid road and nowhere else."

"Oh, but it wouldn't be right, whether she sees us or not," protested Jessie.

"There isn't a bit of harm in it," Adele insisted. "We go every day, and just because we are not with them it doesn't matter. I am going further whether any one likes it or not." She gave a little jerk to the reins and Dapple Gray started off on a trot. The excitement of a faster gait stirred Adele to further desire for a rapid drive. "I am tired to death of this old road," she declared. "I want to go somewhere new. I am going to turn up this way."

"Oh, no, please don't," begged Jessie.

"You needn't say a word," Adele interrupted. "You haven't a thing to do with it. This is my pony and my cart, and you have to do it to sit still. You are my company and I am taking you to drive."

Jessie felt that this was quite true, though she knew that Adele was doing wrong. She realized that she ought to do something, but she did not know just what. If she insisted upon getting out and going home she would leave Adele all alone, and that would be worse than staying to help her out of any difficulty into which she might fall. "Perhaps I'd better drive," she ventured after a while when Adele had recklessly driven over a big stone and had almost bumped into a stump by the way.

"No, you shall not," returned Adele. "The only way to learn to do a thing is to keep on doing it, no matter if you do it wrong sometimes. Papa always says so."

Jessie had nothing to reply to this, but she watched Adele carefully. They were coming to a hill. Jessie looked around earnestly. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "do be careful, Adele. We are

coming to the cut. It is at the foot of this hill. We came by the mill, I remember, and this leads by the old schoolhouse. We'd better turn and go back."

"No, thank you," replied Adele, "I'm going on. If you are scared you can get out and walk."

Jessie's feelings were deeply hurt. She wasn't exactly scared, but she knew at the foot of the hill was the railroad cut, and though there was always some one there, if the horse took fright, or if anything happened to the cart or harness, it might mean an accident. "We have to cross the railroad," she said after a pause.

"Well, suppose we do ; other people cross it," was the answer.

"Hold him in," cried Jessie sharply, clutching at the reins as Dapple Gray went down the hill at a more rapid rate than she felt safe.

"Just let me alone," cried Adele giving Dapple Gray a light touch with the whip.

"Don't ! Don't !" cried Jessie, but Adele only laughed, and directly they were at the foot of the hill where the railroad ran. Instead of taking a clean straight course across it, Adele tried

to drive diagonally. "There's a whistle," cried Jessie in alarm. Adele raised the whip again. Dapple Gray made a plunge forward. A wheel caught and presently Jessie was conscious that she was rolling down an embankment. Then she knew nothing for some time.

When she came to her senses, she was lying in a little gully among some bushes. She raised her head and then struggled to her feet. "No bones broken," she said to herself, though she felt shaken and sore. She stood up and looked around. At a little distance she saw Adele sitting sobbing miserably. She ran toward her as fast as her bruises would allow. "Oh, Adele! Adele!" she cried, "are you hurt?"

"Oh! my arm, my arm," moaned Adele. "I believe it is broken."

"Oh, dear, dear, how dreadful," responded Jessie. "Where is Dapple Gray?"

"I don't know."

Jessie climbed the bank and there saw Dapple Gray patiently standing, a broken wheel showing what had happened. The wheel had caught in the track and although both girls were thrown out as the wheel gave way the little pony had

not bolted, but stood his ground. Jessie went up to him, and began to unfasten the harness. "It won't do for you to stand so near the track," she said. "You were a dear good pony not to run. The cart isn't on the track, I am glad to say." She led the pony down the bank to where Adele sat. "We are quite a way from home," she said. "Shall you be afraid to stay here while I go for some one to take us back?"

"Oh, don't leave me, don't leave me," Adele wept.

"If you could come up a little higher, you could watch me as I go," said Jessie. "Ezra lives the nearest, and I am going down the track to call him." Adele, still moaning and crying, allowed herself to be led to a higher spot. "I don't think there will be any more trains for some time," Jessie assured her, "and if you stay right here you can watch me going and coming. I will be as quick as I can."

Adele suffered herself to be left and Jessie set out. Further down the railroad spanned a gully through which ran the brook. The only way to cross it was upon a narrow board walk on one side the bridge, this being used by the workmen

as a short cut. The longer way was to go down hill and around to a foot-bridge higher up the brook. Jessie hesitated when she reached the path which led down hill. Should she go that way, or should she venture across the railroad bridge? If she did not look down and hold closely to the railing, perhaps it would not be so bad. She decided to try. So she stepped cautiously upon the planks and went on slowly, doing very well till she reached the middle, when incautiously she glanced down at the rushing water below. For one moment she felt sick and faint. Everything swam around. Then she closed her eyes and held tightly to the railing, stepping along slowly, each moment seeming an hour. In a few minutes her heart stopped its rapid beating and her head felt steady, so she opened her eyes and fixed them on the opposite bank, not once turning them from there, and at last she was safely over.

A little beyond was Ezra's house with its smiling garden and white fence. Although she felt sore and bruised she began to run, forgetting her pain in her anxiety to reach the house. It was about Ezra's supper time; there would be no

trains coming or going at this time of day, and she would be sure to find the old man at home. So she began to call, "Ezra! Ezra!" and presently she saw his gray head over the fence.

He opened the gate and came out to meet her. "Why, little girl!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing on this road? 'Tain't your way from home. Why, your face is cut and you're all mussed up. Tumble down?"

"Oh, Ezra! Ezra!" cried Jessie, seizing his hand, "the pony cart upset us over the bank there by the cut, and Adele has hurt her arm. The pony is all right. He is standing just as still, but the cart-wheel is off so we can't get home, at least I don't know how to get Adele and the pony home."

"Where did you say they were?" asked Ezra.

"On the other side of the gully, there by the cut."

"You didn't come over the railroad bridge?"

"Yes, it was the shortest way," said Jessie simply.

Ezra uttered an exclamation. "You poor little tot, what would your mother say? Suppose you had slipped under the hand-rail and had fallen into the water?"

"I shut my eyes when I got dizzy."

"Humph! Well, you don't go back, that's all. Come right in here and let my daughter straighten you out, wash off that poor little battered up face. Mark and I will go get the pony and the little girl. What do ye say her name is?"

"Adele. Adele Hallett."

Ezra nodded. "Belongs to the yellow house. What ye been doing driving off in that direction by yourselves, is what I want to know."

Jessie was silent. She did not like to blame Adele, though she knew it was entirely her fault. "I told Adele I'd hurry back," she said.

"You're not going back," declared Ezra. "I'll look after that young miss myself. Come right in the house. Here, Kitty," he spoke to a young woman at the door. "Here's Miss Loomis that brought us those good apples. She's had an accident up the road a piece. Her and a young miss was out driving, and as far as I can make out they got catched on the railroad and a wheel came off. You tidy her up a bit while Mark and me goes after the other one."

Jessie had often seen Ezra's daughter as well as her husband Mark, and she was quite willing

to be taken indoors to have her face bathed, the dirt brushed from her clothes and herself generally looked after. There was a tremendous bruise on her leg, one stocking was badly torn, and the side of her face was scraped and sore where she had fallen against the bank.

"It's lucky you weren't killed outright," said Kitty, when by dint of much questioning she learned how the thing happened. "Pappy'll be back in no time. You just set still and wait for him. I reckon your ma'll be glad to see you alive when she hears what's went on."

She established Jessie in a chair by the window and continued her preparations for supper. In a very short time Ezra and Mark were back again with Adele in the wagon and Dapple Gray behind it. "I conclude she has broken her arm," said Ezra to his daughter as he came into the house. "There ain't no time to lose in getting her to the doctor to have it sot, so I think the quickest way is to drive her right to Dr. Sadtler's and let him see what's wrong. I ain't said nothin' to her about what I think."

"Pore little thing," said Kitty, "she looks real white."

Jessie had flown to Adele. "I couldn't come," she exclaimed. "Ezra wouldn't let me. Do you feel any better?"

"No." Adele shook her head and her tears broke out afresh. "I want to go home, I want to go home," she sobbed.

Ezra came out before Jessie had time for another word. "You stay here, honey," he said to Jessie. "I'll take this young lady to the doctor and let him fix her up so she'll feel better and then we'll come back for you."

But Adele wailed out, "Go with me, Jessie. Go with me. I don't want to see the doctor all alone."

"Ezra will be with you," said Jessie who was feeling rather shaky herself.

"Yes, sir, Ezra will be right with you," said that person, "and moreover this young miss isn't to go; she isn't fit, all bruised up as she is. You won't be alone, bless you, child. There ain't a kinder woman in the country than Mrs. Sadtler, and she'll mother you fine. You'll be all right in no time. No, you don't!" he stopped Jessie from climbing into the wagon. Mark had unfastened Dapple Gray and had tied him to the

hitching-post. "We'll go for the cart after a while," said Ezra gathering up the reins. "You wait here, child, and I'll be back as quick as I can." So Jessie was obliged to see Adele drive off while she was left to Kitty's tender mercies.

CHAPTER IX
The Gray Kitten



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The Gray Kitten

It was a very subdued and wan little Adele who was helped into the house by the doctor, who remained to explain the situation, while Ezra took Jessie home. Poor Miss Betty was overcome at sight of her niece with her arm in splints and looking so pale. "Child! child!" she cried. "What has happened? We have been so anxious about you. At first we thought you had gone home with Jessie, but Otto said he saw you driving in an opposite direction." She turned to the doctor. "What has happened?" she asked tremulously.

"It seems the young ladies were crossing the track just there by the cut and the wheel caught in the track, upsetting their cart and throwing them out. Fortunately there is no worse damage done than a broken arm and a broken cart."

"The horse ran away!" exclaimed Miss Betty.

"Not a bit of it. Fine little beast that he is,

he stood stock still. Little Loomis girl was thrown into some bushes. She was stunned by the fall, but seems all right otherwise except for a few bruises. She was a little Trojan, Ezra Limpett tells me, and tramped across that dangerous railroad bridge to get help. You'd better have this child put to bed, Miss Hallett, and I see you look rather the worse for wear yourself."

"I've had one of my headaches," replied Miss Betty, passing her hand over her forehead.

"Humph! Fine time to take for explorations. I gather that's what the youngsters were doing. At least my wife says so." The doctor spoke as if he had no patience with such doings.

Miss Betty turned a troubled face upon Adele. "Oh, my child, how could you?" she exclaimed. "Didn't you know we do not allow you to go out of sight of the house?"

Adele burst into loud sobs. "There, there," said Miss Betty, soothingly; "I am sure you have had punishment enough, and I won't scold, but I wish your father had never bought you that pony. I shall never have an easy day after this."

"The pony is all right," declared the doctor. "He had the good sense not to run when he felt

the wheel going. He is a fine little fellow and it is due to his good behavior that the children came to no worse mishap. I'll leave a quieting draught for the child, Miss Hallett, and something for that head of yours."

"My head was better," said Miss Betty weakly.

"This won't come amiss," replied the doctor, putting a few tablets into a small phial. "Get the child to bed and go yourself. I'll come again in the morning."

So while those in the yellow house were looking after Adele, Jessie was being driven home behind Ezra's old white horse and was delivered safe, if not quite sound, into her mother's arms.

As it was getting late Mrs. Loomis was getting anxious, and was about to send Max to the Halletts' after his little sister. Ezra had not waited for thanks, but as soon as he had set Jessie safely down before her own door he drove off at as rapid a pace as his old horse could travel. At Jessie's sudden appearance looking as if she had been through the wars her mother cried out: "Why, my child, what is the matter? How did you get such a scratched face? and look at your stocking torn to shreds."

"Well, I vow!" exclaimed Walter, "you do look a sight! Been climbing trees, I bet."

"Indeed I've not," returned Jessie. "I can climb trees, but I haven't done it to-day. I'll tell you, mother, but I don't want to before Walter."

"Oh, all right," said that person indifferently, "I don't want to know."

Jessie slipped her hand into her mother's. "Come up-stairs," she said in a whisper, "and I'll show you my leg."

"Your leg?" Mrs. Loomis began to look alarmed, and led Jessie up-stairs. "My dear child," she said when they had entered Jessie's little room, "what has happened?"

"It wasn't my fault, indeed it wasn't," began Jessie trying to be brave, but now that she was in the safe harbor of her mother's arms, feeling that she could not keep back the tears. "I tried to make Adele stop, and not go out of sight, but she just would and would go further and further. She was bent and determined to go as far as she could, and I was afraid to let her go off by herself, and yet I knew it wasn't right for us to be driving out of sight. I truly didn't know what

to do, mother. She wouldn't let me drive nor get out nor anything and she wouldn't go back, so all I could do was to sit still. Then she drove bias across the railroad track, and the wheel caught, and we were tipped out. I fell down into some bushes and got an awful bruise. Just see." She displayed a large black and blue surface to her mother.

"Why, you poor child, that certainly is a bruise. I must bathe it after a while. But now go on with your story." Mrs. Loomis's hands trembled as she held Jessie closer.

"Then," continued the little girl, "when I came to my senses I didn't see Adele at first, but I saw Dapple Gray standing quite still by the railroad track. A cart-wheel was off and the cart was tipped down the bank. But wasn't Dapple Gray good not to move?"

"He was indeed, but oh, my little daughter, I dare not think what might have happened. Suppose a train had been coming along."

"One did whistle. It was a freight train, I think, but it must have passed before we got there. Well, I picked myself up and found Adele sitting there crying about her arm. She has

broken it, mother, but we didn't know it then and there wasn't any house nearer than Ezra's so I went there." She hesitated for a moment before going on. "It was so much nearer not to go across the foot-bridge, so I went the other way."

"Oh, Jessie!" Mrs. Loomis turned pale.

"Yes, I did. I knew that perhaps I ought not, but it would save time, you see. I did get awfully dizzy just in the middle, but I shut my eyes and said,

" 'God shall charge His angel legions
Watch and ward o'er thee to keep,'

and presently I felt all right, so I got over safely and found Ezra—oh, dear, he hasn't had his supper. Isn't that too bad!—and Kitty washed my face and fixed me up while Ezra and Mark went for Adele and took her to the doctor. Then they stopped for me and we all took Adele home and then Ezra brought me."

"My darling child, what a dreadful time you have had," exclaimed Mrs. Loomis.

"I haven't told any one but you about Adele, mother, truly I haven't. I never said to any one

that it was her fault. Could I help it happening? What ought I to have done?"

Mrs. Loomis was silent for a moment. "It was a very hard position for a little girl, so hard that I do not see how I can consent to your being thrown with so wilful a child as Adele. I am afraid for the consequences."

"Oh, mother!" There were surprise and regret in Jessie's tones. "Am I never to play with her again, poor Adele! And am I never to go to the yellow house? Not for lessons or anything? Oh, mother!"

"I shall have to think it over, dear, and have a talk with your father before we can decide. It is a very serious matter for us to have our only dear little girl placed in such danger as you were in to-day. So far as you were concerned I really do not see how you can be blamed, and you tried to be brave and noble for Adele's sake, but we must make it impossible for such a thing to happen again. Now, come down and have some supper, and then I think you'd better go to bed, for it has been a very exciting day for you. There will be no lessons to-morrow and you'd better not get up very early." She did not say that

she still felt anxious lest Jessie had suffered more from the accident than at once appeared.

The next morning Jessie woke up feeling stiff and sore, and was glad when Max came up with her breakfast. He had added some ripe persimmons to her bill of fare and was so kind and solicitous that Jessie quite enjoyed the reputation of invalid. Walter, too, poked his head in the door and asked how she was feeling, blundering out a half apology by saying, "Why didn't you tell a fellow what was the matter when you came in?" Then he tossed a little pale pink rose on the bed and ran away. The rose was the last of the season and he had found it braving the frost which had sweetened the persimmons. Minerva, also, came up with a plate of tiny hot biscuits which she had baked especially for the little girl.

Later in the day Max was sent over to inquire how Adele was, and brought back the report that she was doing very well but had had a feverish night. By the time Max had returned Jessie had found bed rather a tiresome place and so had begged to be allowed to get up and come down.

Her father looked her over, asked many questions and finally decided that the big bruise was

her worst hurt and that she could go out and in as she pleased. "Run out of doors all you want to," he said, "but don't get tired out," so Jessie availed herself of this permission and concluded to go hunt up the boys.

She found them in the barn amusing themselves with Eb. He had learned to say, "Hallo!" and was walking back and forth on a beam, cocking his eye and looking down at the boys below.

"He's a funny fellow," said Max as Jessie came in. "I'd like to take him back to school. We're going Monday. Carl is all right, they say."

"It certainly would make the children laugh and
play

To see a crow at school,"

said Jessie laughing.

"Jessie had a little crow

As black as you can think.

It followed her to school one day

And drank up all the ink,"

said Max.

"Ho, I can do better than that," boasted Walter.

“ Jessie had a little crow
As black as any sloe
And everywhere that Jessie went
The crow was sure to go.”

“ What is a sloe ? ” asked Jessie.

“ I’m sure I don’t know,” said Walter. “ Ask Max. He is the walking dictionary.”

“ It is a kind of plum, I believe,” Max told them.

“ I never saw a plum as black as Ebon is,” said Jessie, stroking the shining feathers of the bird who had flown down and was sitting on her wrist.

“ And I suppose you never saw a green rose, but I have,” returned Max.

“ Where did you see it ? ” Jessie asked.

“ In a greenhouse, Mr. Atkinson’s.”

“ Well, I suppose plums could be black,” said Jessie persuaded that Max knew what he was talking about.

“ Look at Eb pecking at your buttons, Jess,” said Walter. “ He has one almost off.”

Jessie wore a red jacket whose bright buttons pleased Ebon’s fancy. “ He is getting to be a great mischief,” she said. “ He tried to carry off mother’s thimble yesterday. Go ’long, Eb. Go

pretend you are a chicken or something. Max, will you go with me to Effie Hinsdale's to get my kitten? It is big enough now, and if I am not to go to Adele's any more I shall need the kitten."

"Let's go with her," proposed Walter. "Then we can see Jack and some of the other boys. We'll go, Jess."

Walter was very amiable to-day, Jessie thought. He really loved his little sister, and the fact that she had been in great danger the day before made him realize what it would be to lose her.

"We might get both kittens," said Jessie, "and then we could leave Adele's for her on our way home. She will be so glad to have it now that she has a broken arm and no one to play with."

"Do you suppose her father will sell Dapple Gray?" said Walter. "I wish our father could buy him."

"Adele would feel awfully to have him sold," said Jessie. "Oh, dear!" she drew a long sigh.

"What's the matter?" asked Max anxiously.

"Nothing much. I was only thinking what a pity it is that things can't always go right."

"I don't see what possessed you two to go off that way," said Walter reading her thoughts.

"I don't either," returned Jessie turning away. "I'm going up to the house now to get a basket for the kittens."

"I don't believe she had a thing to do with it," said Max to his brother when Jessie was out of hearing. "I'll bet it was the Hallett girl that wanted to have her way, and Jess won't tell on her."

"That's pretty decent of Jess then," said Walter, "and it was pretty fine of that pony not to bolt when the wheel came off. I'll tell you a pony like that is worth having. Ezra said he stood as still as a post till they led him away."

"I reckon Mr. Hallett won't want to give him up," returned Max.

"But he'll not let those two kids go driving off by themselves again," remarked Walter with the superiority of his years, which were but two more than Jessie's.

Jessie with her two brothers made the visit to the Hinsdales, and Jessie bore away the gray kitten in triumph, but her pleasure was marred by finding that the black kitten had been given to a cousin of the cook's, so there was none for Adele.

"I am so sorry," said Effie, "but Adele shall have first choice of the next batch."

"She'll be dreadfully disappointed," said Jessie sadly.

"I am so sorry," repeated Effie, "and if there were one left she should have it, but we never take the last one from Tippy, you see; that wouldn't be right, and yours is the last one left to give."

Jessie hugged her own furry darling to her, and, the boys having called out that they couldn't wait any longer, she was obliged to join them, but all the way home she was struggling with a problem. Ought she to give up the gray kitten to Adele? Poor Adele had no brothers and no mother, and, if Jessie must give her up, she would have no playmate. Although Adele had been the means of getting them both into serious trouble, Jessie felt the sorrier for her on account of her very naughtiness, and somehow could only think of her friend as she was in her most charming moods. When she chose, Adele could be the most fascinating of companions, and Jessie believed that her love was very genuine, so the more she thought of it the more she felt that she ought to give up the kitten.

However, she decided not to make up her mind right away, and in the meantime she need not let Adele know that the gray kitten had been taken away from Effie's. But while she was weighing the matter in her own mind came a note from Adele that settled the question. It arrived the next morning, and was the outcome of a visit from Effie who had literally let the cat out of the bag when she went to see how Adele was. The note ran thus :

"You don't love me, for you haven't been to see me and I suppose you think I am too bad to play with. You can go to your old Polly and stay with her all the time. I shall not trubble you, but I want my Peter Pan and I know Polly has stoled him to spite me. Efy says you have your kiten. What made you take it when there wassent any for me? Oh, I am verry miserble with nobuddy to play with. If Polly dossent send back my Peter Pan I am going to burn her up. Her scraggy hair would make a luvly blaze.

"Your forsakened frend,

"ADELE."

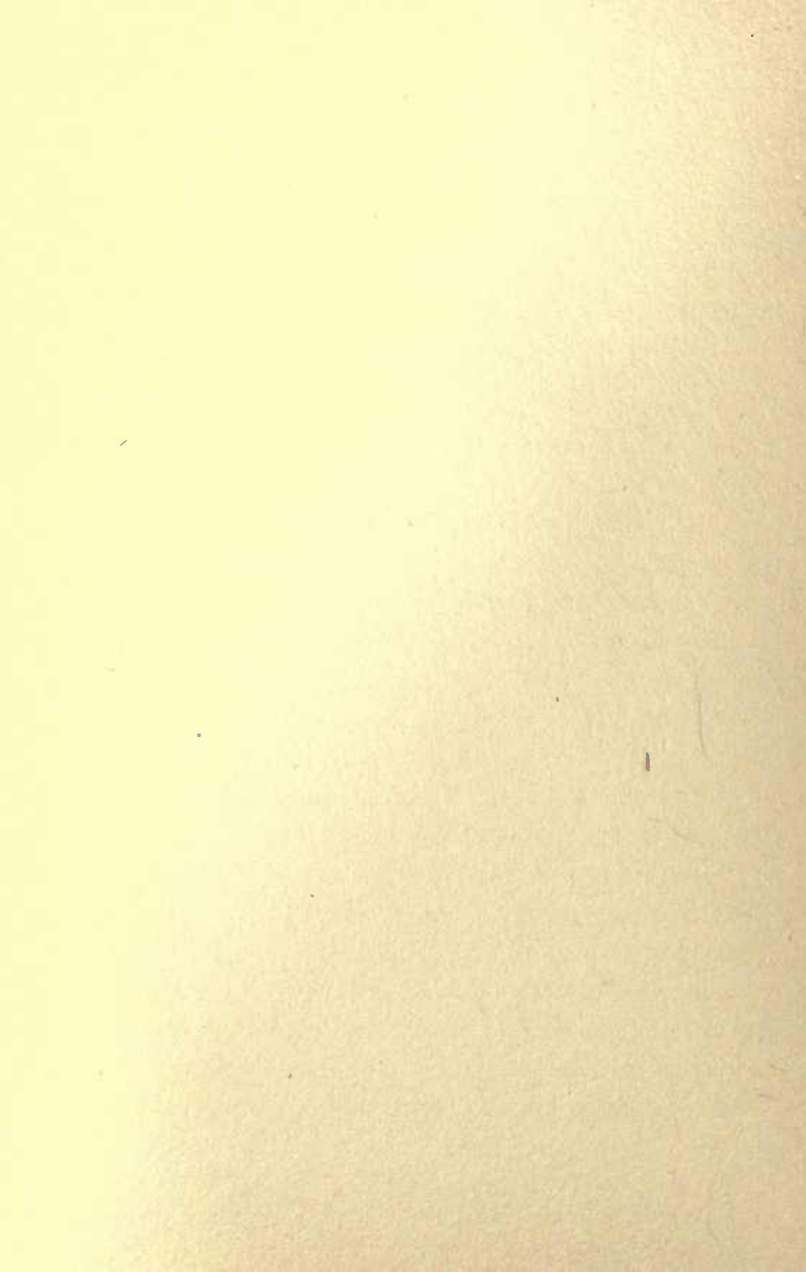
At the end was a tear-stained postscript which read : "I did love you. I did, I did."

Evidently Adele was in one of her worst

moods and was feeling very remorseful and unhappy. This Jessie knew, but at the same time she was indignant that Adele should still harp upon Polly's wickedness. Of course it was very absurd for her to say such things, for how could Polly steal anything? Yet the note quite decided Jessie not to give up the gray kitten. and her pity for Adele suffered a change.

CHAPTER X

Across Water



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IT was some time before the two little girls met, for Mrs. Loomis could not make up her mind to allow Jessie to go over to the yellow house, while Miss Betty and Miss Eloise appreciated the fact that there was reason for hard feelings against Adele, and moreover thought that nothing would make the little sinner realize her misdoing more than such a punishment as a separation from Jessie. Mrs. Loomis had not failed to get daily reports of Adele's progress and sent her over many dainties while she was in bed, so that Adele's remorse was all the greater.

Jessie answered the note by saying she was very sorry about the kitten, but she did not refer to Peter Pan nor to Playmate Polly. For a whole week she was obliged to spend her time with her old companions, for the boys returned to school as expected, so Eb and the gray kitten were a great source of solace. Eb took a great

fancy to Cloudy, and it was very funny to see him, with outspread wings, hopping after the prancing kitten who was in no way afraid of him, and who would give him little impertinent dabs when he came too near. He infinitely preferred Cloudy to the chickens.

Finally when a week had gone by, and Jessie, who had avoided the brook for some days, was again playing with Peter Pan and Playmate Polly, she looked across the little stream to see a wistful pair of dark eyes gazing at her. "Oh, Adele!" she cried, "are you able to come out again?"

A flashing smile changed the expression of Adele's face. "I was so afraid you wouldn't speak to me," she exclaimed. "I can't come over, for I am trying awfully hard to be good. Can't you come to this side?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Jessie slowly, "but perhaps if each stays on her own side we can have some sort of play and won't be disobedient either."

"I think that will be lovely," cried Adele. "What can we play? I can use only my right arm, you know."

"Will it be a long time before you can use the other?" asked Jessie interestedly.

"Not so very, very long. The doctor says it is doing very well indeed, but oh, Jessie, it has been awful without you."

"Are you having lessons?"

"No, not yet. Aunt Betty hasn't said anything about that, and—and," the tears came to her eyes, "if you are not there I shall hate lessons worse than ever. I was getting so I didn't mind them."

"It is too bad," returned Jessie.

"I suppose your mother thinks I am too wicked for you to play with," remarked Adele after an awkward pause.

"Well,—not exactly," Jessie wondered how she could explain, "but you see she is afraid we'll get into some mischief."

"I know, I know," returned Adele. "I suppose I am very wicked, but I shall never want to be good if we can't be friends."

Jessie pondered for a moment over this speech. It made her feel a great responsibility. She wondered if her mother knew that Adele was in danger of becoming very, very wicked, if it would

make any difference in her decision about their friendship. Certainly it was a subject that needed to be discussed, and it should be done that very night when Jessie and her mother had their last little talk before Mrs. Loomis kissed her daughter good-night. For the present it would be best not to talk about it, and so she said, "I'll tell you what we can do; we can send boats back and forth to each other. You can stay on one end of the log and I will stay on the other."

"If I come to the middle, will you come and kiss me?" asked Adele.

Jessie thought there could be no harm in doing that upon strictly neutral ground. "But we mustn't stay there," she concluded.

"Oh, no, we won't stay there," agreed Jessie. So they proceeded to the middle of the log that spanned the brook, fervently kissed one another, and then retreated each to her own side.

"I'll get some chips," said Jessie, "and throw some over to you. We ought to have some string, too. Oh, I know where there is some; in the grotto I had a little ball of it the other day, and I put it there to keep it safe."

"Is the grotto just the same?" asked Adele

wistfully. "I should so love to see it. I wish I could come over just for a minute. Do you think I might?"

Jessie shook her head decidedly. "No, I don't think you ought. Of course I'd love to have you, but it would be disobeying; even doing it once would be disobeying."

"It is very hard to be perfectly good," returned Adele woefully.

"Yes, it is," sighed Jessie, "but when we are sure a thing is wrong we ought not to do it. Sometimes you aren't quite sure, and sometimes you forget. Forgetting is my worst sin," she added solemnly.

"I don't know what mine is, my very worst, I mean. When I begin to think about them I am afraid to go to bed at night."

"Oh! Mother always ——" began Jessie and then she remembered that there was no mother to whom Adele could unburden her conscience and from whom she could receive loving advice and comfort. She therefore changed the subject quickly. "I am going to get the string and the chips," she said, "and I will send you over a load of persimmons. Do you like them? I brought

some with me this morning. They are so good now that we have had frost. I don't suppose I can send more than one or two at a time."

Adele was delighted at the prospect of receiving such a valuable cargo which by dint of a long switch Jessie managed to pilot safely over to a spot where Adele could reach it. The second expedition was not so successful, however, but was lost in the raging torrent before it was half-way across. When a vessel is only six inches long it is very hard to navigate among the whirlpools of an uncertain stream. Nevertheless at least half a dozen persimmons reached the other shore and were duly consumed by the person to whom they were consigned.

"There will be chestnuts pretty soon," said Jessie. "I shouldn't wonder if there were some now. We might go and get some. Oh, I forgot they are on this side. Never mind, I will get Sam to gather some and to-morrow I can send you over a lot. I can put them in a basket and tie the basket on a long pole and in that way I can reach them over to you. Oh, I wonder if the boys took all those they gathered. I am go-

ing to the barn to see, and if they didn't I'll bring all I can. Just wait a minute."

She ran off to the barn and pretty soon came back. She stopped on the way to put something in the grotto, and then went on to the brook with a small covered basket. "I'd better tie it on this pole," she said, "for it might fall off. It is full of chestnuts. When you have emptied them send the basket back to me, and I will put something else in it."

"What will you put in it?" asked Adele watching Jessie tie the basket securely to the pole.

"That is a secret," said Jessie laughing.

By going upon the log she was able to reach far enough so that Adele could get the basket which was unfastened and sent back after it had been emptied of its contents. "I think you were lovely to send me all these," said Adele delightedly.

"Oh, we shall have plenty more," Jessie told her. "Sam says there are lots down in the big field. You shall have some of those, too. Now be very careful when you untie the basket this time. It isn't for you to keep always, but only for a little while."

While Adele was puzzling over this, Jessie went off to the grotto from which she abstracted something. She kept her back to Adele, and was some time in getting the basket settled to suit her. "I am just crazy to see what it is," said Adele excitedly.

Jessie laughed and this time went further out upon the log carrying the pole very carefully and reaching it out to where Adele stood at the other end of the log. "Go a little further away when you open the basket," she suggested, and Adele, wondering, obeyed.

She opened the lid of the basket and peeped in. "Oh!" she cried, "how lovely!"

"He has only come for a visit," said Jessie hurriedly. "His name is Cloudy, you know. I thought you might like to see him."

"Isn't he a darling?" said Adele snuggling the kitten up against her face.

Jessie watched her with a serious countenance. Presently she said rather breathlessly, "Would you like to call him half yours? I don't believe I could give him to you altogether, but we might go shares, you know."

Adele sat down with the kitten in her lap.

"Jessie Loomis, I think you are the dearest girl that ever lived," she said earnestly, "and I should love to come over there and hug you, but I won't, because I must be good. No, I won't let you give me even half the kitten, but I do love to have him come over for a visit. See, he is sleepy. Shall I put him back in the basket and let him have a nap?"

"He has just had a big saucer of milk," said Jessie, "but he is very playful most of the time. You might let him have a little nap, and I will find something else to send over to you."

"No, let me send something this time; you have done it all," said Adele. "I'll go up to the house in a minute and get something. Would you mind if I took Cloudy to show to Aunt Betty and Miss Eloise? I won't let anything happen to him and I'll bring him right back."

"Of course you may take him," Jessie consented generously. And carrying the basket steadily, Adele sped away.

She was not gone very long and when she came back she brought a small paper bag of cakes and another of candies which were promptly despatched across the watery way to Jessie; but

as Cloudy was asleep in the basket the little bags themselves were tied on the pole and were transported in that way.

"Aunt Betty said Cloudy was lovely," said Adele, "and he behaved beautifully. I told her how generous you offered to be, and she sent her love to you."

"What did Miss Eloise say?"

"She wasn't there. Aunt Betty said she had gone somewhere, but she didn't say where. I asked Aunt Betty if she thought papa would bring me a kitten from the city, and she said he was going to bring me a big dog in place of Dapple Gray. I'd love a big dog."

"But where is Dapple Gray?" asked Jessie.

"He's been sent away," said Adele in a low voice. "Papa said as long as I couldn't be trusted that I couldn't have him to drive till I was old enough to have common sense, and so he has sent him to my cousin till my sense grows enough for me to have him again. Do you suppose common sense does grow?"

"I think it must," returned Jessie thoughtfully, "for all grown people have it."

"I don't believe they do," said Adele, "for I

have heard papa say ever so many times that So-and-So had not a grain of common sense, and So-and-So would be a big man, too."

"Well, maybe they get it and then lose it," replied Jessie, "like some persons do their hair. Some persons have a great deal, and others are quite bald, you know, like Dr. Sadtler."

This seemed a reasonable conclusion and Adele accepted it. "Well," she said, "I hope if I ever do get my common sense that it will be nice and thick and long like Miss Eloise's hair."

"Is your cousin a little girl?" asked Jessie returning to her thoughts of Dapple Gray.

"No, he is a little boy, and he has been very ill, so papa said it would be a great comfort to him to have a little pony like that."

"Is he a big boy?" asked Jessie.

"About as big as your brother Max."

"He will hate to give Dapple Gray up?" said Jessie.

"Maybe he will be strong and well again by the time my common sense gets here," said Adele. "I hope that won't be so very long."

"I hope so, too," replied Jessie, thinking more of Dapple Gray than of Adele's development.

"Cloudy is waking up," said Adele. "I'd better send him back to you."

"Tie the basket on very strongly," said Jessie, "so it can't fall in the water."

But though Adele tied the basket securely enough, she was not quite so certain of her own footing, her useless arm causing her to lose her balance, and in regaining it she allowed the pole to drop so far that the basket was dipped into the water, though fortunately not so far that Cloudy received more wetting than gave him two dripping paws.

"Oh, dear, I am so relieved," said Adele. "I thought he was drowned. Why am I always doing such dreadful things?"

"You couldn't help it," Jessie assured her. "You have only one arm, you see, and it was very hard to manage that long pole." She dried Cloudy's paws on her handkerchief and then cuddled him under her jacket. "I think I shall have to carry him up to the house," she said, "for he might take cold. Besides, I am sure it must be nearly dinner time."

"We have had a perfectly lovely time," returned Adele. "I was so miserable last night

when I went to bed, and I cried myself to sleep."

"What made you so miserable?"

"Why, you see Dapple Gray went away yesterday afternoon, and I felt so lonely when I thought I couldn't have you or him either. I am so glad you came down to the brook this morning. Will you come again this afternoon?"

"If mother says I may."

"Are you going to tell her?"

"Tell her what?"

"That you have been playing with me all the morning."

"Of course I shall tell her. I tell her everything, and you know we have minded exactly, for neither one of us has crossed the brook. Mother never said I couldn't talk to you; she only said I was not to go over to your place."

"And Aunt Betty said I mustn't go to your place, so we really have minded them, haven't we?"

"I should think we had," replied Jessie.
"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," responded Adele. And both little girls went off feeling very virtuous.

Jessie did not delay in telling her mother all about the morning's meeting. "Do you mind, mother?" she asked.

"No," answered her mother. "I don't think I do in the least. I see that you both meant to be obedient, and I think the hard lesson Adele has had promises to do her a great deal of good."

"I feel so sorry for her, oh, so sorry," said Jessie thoughtfully. "She cried herself to sleep last night because she was so lonely. If she had had you, mother, to tuck her up and kiss her good-night and to make her feel comfortable inside, as you do me after I have been naughty, she wouldn't have felt so."

"Poor little child," said Mrs. Loomis compassionately.

"I think she loves me very much," said Jessie, "and she did just as I told her was right this morning. She never said one word about Polly or Peter Pan, either. Don't you think I can be friends with her again, mother?"

"I think you can, for I am sure that you can do a great deal for her. It is evident that she has never been used to giving her confidences to her aunt, and so far, Miss Eloise has not been

able to win them. I think Miss Eloise will in time, and meanwhile we must do all we can. Miss Eloise was here this morning, dearie."

"Was she? Then that is why she was not at home when Adele took Cloudy up to show her. What did she say, mother?"

"She said a great many things, and some things she said made me decide to let you begin your lessons again, but I would rather you did not spend too much time at the yellow house. If you go there in the morning, that will be enough, and in the afternoon it will be better for Adele to come here to play with you. I think it is getting too cold to play by the brook, but there is the attic where you can be perfectly safe. I will have one end cleared for you, and you can have all your playthings up there." Jessie threw her arms around her mother's neck. "You are just the dearest mother in the world," she cried. "I wish Adele had one exactly like you. May I just go down to the brook a few minutes this afternoon and tell her, and may I bring her back with me?"

Mrs. Loomis smiled down at the eager face as she gave her consent.

"Just one thing more," said Jessie. "Do you mind if I stay long enough to shut up Peter Pan's house for the winter? It won't take long."

"No, Miss Wendy, I don't mind, if you will promise to mind the tree tops."

Jessie laughed, and felt very thankful that she had such a mother.

CHAPTER XI
Who Took the Spoons?

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LESSONS began again the next day, and this time continued without interruption until the holidays. It would not be quite true to say that there were never any more tantrums, but it is a fact that they were less violent, and occurred less frequently. Adele really was trying to improve, and if Jessie herself once in a while had what Adele called "the pouts" and always mocked and made fun of her, Jessie was ashamed to continue them for very long, for she hated to be made fun of. The two had their little quarrels, to be sure, and sometimes did not speak for as much as a whole day, but night usually brought regret and the next morning each would be eager to make up.

One day Jessie coming home from school found her mother counting the silver. "Jessie," she said, "do you remember taking any of these small teaspoons at any time?"

"Why no, mother," returned Jessie. "I al-

ways have a kitchen spoon, you know, and I haven't had one of those for a long time, not since that day I had the marmalade down by the brook."

"I don't see where they can have gone," said Mrs. Loomis. "There are two missing, and I am sure they were all here last week. Minerva is very careful and I don't think she could possibly have thrown them out. You are quite sure that you and Adele have not had them up in the attic?"

"I am quite sure," returned Jessie, "but I will go and look."

"I wish you would," said her mother.

Jessie trudged up to the attic and searched among the playthings, but there were no spoons to be seen. She went back to her mother. "They are not there," she said. "Adele and I haven't had anything but dolls' parties up there, and then we used the spoons that belong to the play tea-set."

"I cannot think where they can be," repeated Mrs. Loomis.

"Perhaps the boys had them down at the barn or somewhere," suggested Jessie.

"But I have counted them since they went back to school, and they were all here. I have looked everywhere I can think of, and so has Minerva. They are never taken to the kitchen except to be washed, and the only person who has been along is that old peddler who comes with tins sometimes. I have always thought him an honest old soul, as peddlers go, but I can think of no one else."

"I don't believe it was the peddler," said Jessie. "He has been coming here for a long time, and he is always very nice and kind. He gave me a ring with a blue set in it one day because he said he liked little girls, and that he once had a little daughter about my age who died. I am sure it couldn't be the peddler."

"It doesn't seem to me so either," returned Mrs. Loomis, "but where are the spoons?"

Jessie shook her head, and the loss remained a mystery, for no amount of searching brought them to light. It even became more and more mystifying, for in a few days a little coffee-spoon was missing. It was a souvenir spoon which had been sent to Mrs. Loomis by her sister, and had been left on Mrs. Loomis's

dressing bureau after the box containing it was opened.

"This is more and more perplexing," said Mrs. Loomis, "for I know positively that I left it in my room, and who in the world could go up there without my knowledge?"

This was the last spoon taken, and although the matter was not forgotten it was after a while dropped, all concluding that in some unexplained way the spoons had fallen behind the surbase or through a crack in the floor. This might explain the disappearance of the teaspoons, for there was a large crack in the kitchen floor near the fireplace, but it could not account for the coffee-spoon. "I'll have that board in the kitchen taken up in the spring," said Mr. Loomis. "We don't want to take the stove down now, and no doubt you will find the other in your room somewhere when the spring cleaning is done." So the matter rested.

When Jessie told Adele about the loss she declared that Playmate Polly had taken them. It was her way to charge Playmate Polly with all sorts of evil traits, and the two little girls quarreled upon this subject oftener than any other,

absurd as it was. If Adele wanted to tease Jessie she had but to say something disagreeable about Playmate Polly, and Jessie's anger would rise, so that it finally became as a red rag to a bull, and the more Adele teased the more Jessie resented it.

They seldom played by the brook now, but the attic was a great source of pleasure. It was well heated by a register, so there was no danger that the children should take cold. A set of shelves on one side made a fine playhouse, and Sam had made a low table of just the proper height. It was a rough sort of affair, but served its purpose. The legs of two old chairs were sawed down to suit the children and a bit of old carpet was spread upon the floor, so they considered that the playroom was finely furnished. Minerva put up a little white curtain at the window, and would always remember them on baking days with a little pie, a pan of tiny rolls, or some small cakes, so that Saturday was feast day as well as holiday.

One Saturday the two children were sitting at the table coloring some pictures in a couple of old magazines. Mr. Hallett had brought them each a small paint box the night before and they

took this first opportunity of trying their powers. Cloudy, attired in the long white frock belonging to Jessie's baby doll, was asleep in an improvised crib made of a small stool turned upside down. He seemed perfectly satisfied and was having a good nap. Charity sat by his side in the character of nurse, and Peter Pan was sitting in a swing which hung from the rafters.

"I think I shall put a red frock on my lady," Adele said.

"I tried red," said Jessie, "but it doesn't go very well. It is kind of thick and messy looking. I believe I will try this yellow." They worked away for a few moments, very much absorbed in their painting, but they were interrupted by a faint mew from the crib. "The baby is waking up," said Jessie, "and he can't walk about very well in that long frock. I shall have to take it off, I suppose, so he can run about."

"But he does look so cunning in it," said Adele admiringly.

"I know he does, and I can put it on again after a while, but mother says I have no right to make him uncomfortable, and to keep him from playing when he wants to, so it will have to come

off, and when he gets sleepy I can put it on again. Oh, what's that?"

Adele ran to the window and drew aside the curtain. "Why, it's Eb," she exclaimed. "He is pecking at the window. He wants to come in. Shall I open the window, Jessie?"

"Why, yes. It won't do any harm to let him stay with us. I wonder how he found his way. You might leave the window open, Adele. It is real warm to-day and then he can go out when he wants to."

"I see how he came," said Adele looking out the window.

"He couldn't fly as high as this with his wings clipped."

"No, but he could fly as high as the smoke-house door. It is open, you see, and then he could fly on the roof, and from there to the branch of that big tree. He could walk along the branch, you see, and get up here."

"So he could, quite easily, and I suppose that is the way he came. It is the first time he has found us. See how pleased he is," for Eb was walking about in the most insinuating manner, dipping and curtsying and making enticing lit-

tle sounds. "Don't let him drink the paint water, Adele; it might make him ill. No, Eb, you can't have that," for Eb, attracted by the bright colors in the box, was trying to peck at them. Jessie shut her box, and Adele did likewise. Then Eb spied the kitten and sidled up to him. The girls watched the two in their funny antics until they heard Minerva calling at the foot of the stairs.

Jessie ran down to her, and presently came back with a little apple pie which she set on the table. "Doesn't it look good?" she said. "Shall we eat it now?"

"We might as well," returned Adele.

"I brought up some milk for the kitten," said Jessie, "so he can sit on one side the table and Eb on the other. I have a stale crust up here that I will soak in the milk and give to Eb. He will like that." So the funny company sat down together, the kitten perched on a high box with a small saucer of milk before him, Eb with his soaked crust on a piece of pasteboard, and the two girls, each with half a pie. Eb was the first to finish his meal and then he flew down to see what other entertainment the place afforded. He

went prying around for a few minutes before he spied Adele's paint brush which she had neglected to put away. The piece of bright metal at one end attracted him and in a moment he was upon the window sill with the brush in his beak. Jessie spied him just as he was about to take flight.

"Oh, see what Eb has!" she cried. "Shut the window quick!"

Adele, who was nearest, jumped up, but Eb was too quick for her and was beyond reach before she could get to him. "He's gone," she cried. "He has gone off with my brush. How shall we get it?"

"You stay here and watch him," said Jessie, "and I will go down and see if I can grab him before he gets away with it."

She ran down-stairs while Adele watched from the window. Still carrying the brush, Eb walked across the roof to the limb of the tree which overhung one side of the house. He took a short flight to the limb, walked along it, flew to the smokehouse and stood there. The door, however, was shut by now, and he was not sure that he could venture to fly down from the roof. Now was Jessie's time. She ran to the kitchen.

"Give me some dough or corn bread, or something, quick, Minerva," she said.

Minerva picked up a piece of corn bread from a plate and gave it to her. "What in the world is the matter with the child?" she said as Jessie scurried out. She followed the little girl to where she stood crumbling the corn bread into one palm. "Well, I declare," she said. "What has he got now?"

"Adele's paint brush," Jessie told her. "Come, Eb. Come get some nice supper."

Eb cocked his head to one side, and regarded the outstretched hand for a moment, then he dropped the paint brush and flew down to Jessie's shoulder. The paint brush rolled down from the roof to the ground. Scattering the crumbs before him, Jessie set Eb down, and ran back, stopping under the window from which Adele was looking and calling up to her, "Here it is. I made him drop it."

"I'll come down and get it," replied Adele.

"Bring Cloudy with you," Jessie called back.

In a few minutes Adele appeared with Cloudy in her arms. "I shut the window," she said. "It is getting dark up there, and I suppose I shall

have Angeline coming for me in a few minutes. I am glad you were able to make Eb give up the brush. What do you suppose he was going to do with it? Isn't he getting to be a thief?"

"He certainly is," said Jessie. "I suppose he was going to hide it somewhere."

"I wonder where?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Where do you suppose he would hide things, Minerva?"

"Bless me, I'm sure I can't tell. Well, there, I shouldn't be the least surprised if he was the one that stole those spoons. It is a wonder none of us thought of that. It's only lately he's taken to carrying off things, though. He tried to get my thimble off my finger yesterday."

"I'm going right in to tell mother about him," said Jessie, "and maybe we can find the spoons if he has hidden them."

Minerva followed the two children into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Loomis was told of the suspicion which rested upon Eb. "Well, I declare," she said. "I verily believe he is the thief. We must watch him, and see where he goes. Keep your eyes open, children, and perhaps we can trace him."

However, Eb was much too sly to be discovered at once, and despite all their efforts they could not find out where he made a hiding-place for his treasures. He was even given the chance to carry away certain articles, but as soon as he saw that he was followed he would drop what he carried and would fly off with a caw of derision. "He is the cleverest creature I ever saw," declared Minerva. "There is no catching him napping. I let him carry off a piece of my red worsted this morning, and would you believe it, he dropped it on the step as soon as I opened the door."

"We'll catch him unawares some time," said Sam.

But as if he knew himself suspected, Eb continued to behave with such secrecy that no one could say that he was really the thief, and finally Jessie declared that she didn't believe he was guilty at all, and she told Adele so.

"No, I don't believe it is he," Adele answered with a gleam of mischief in her eye. "I have always believed it is Polly. I saw Eb sitting on her head whispering things in her ear one day, when I was coming to your house, so maybe he puts her up to it."

"You are so silly, Adele," returned Jessie impatiently, and turning away.

Adele ran after. "Don't get mad, Jessie. Please don't. I was only fooling, but it is such fun to pretend things about Polly. If you won't get mad, I will tell you a secret; a very great secret. Say you aren't mad."

"I'm not so very mad," Jessie answered, the prospect of a secret being more than she could withstand.

The children were in the attic snuggled near the heater, for it had suddenly grown quite cold. "Guess who the secret is about," said Adele.

"About us?"

"You and me, do you mean? Well, partly."

"Is Dapple Gray coming home?"

Adele looked grave. "No, not yet, though papa said the other day that he was very sure I could have him some time, if I kept on improving I'll tell you who the secret is about and then you can guess some more. It is about Miss Eloise."

"Is she going away?" asked Jessie in alarm, for she had become very fond of her teacher.

Adele shook her head. "No, at least she is and she isn't."

"I don't see how that could be."

"Don't you? I do. She might be going away from our house but not from the neighborhood."

"Why should she do that? Oh, do tell me, Adele. I can't possibly guess."

"Well," agreed Adele, "it is this way. Miss Eloise is engaged to be married to a professor or teacher or something. He has been here to see her, and, what do you think? If they can find a house big enough near here they are going to take it and have a school next year, and I shall go to it. Papa is so pleased, because he says he will never have to send me away to school then."

"Shall you like going to a man?" asked Jessie somewhat disturbed.

"Oh, the teachers won't all be men," said Adele, "and I like Mr. Davis very much. So will you, for of course you will go, won't you?"

"I don't know. Where will the school be?"

"They can't tell till they see what house they can get."

Jessie was thoughtful for a moment, then presently she cried, "I know. I know just the place. It isn't very far from here. We can see it from the window, now that the trees are bare.

It is a great big white house with ever so many rooms in it. Father knows all about it. It is this side the railroad track, so I could go there."

"Oh, come, let's go tell Miss Eloise," said Adele with an eagerness which seemed to suggest that perhaps the house would disappear over night. And the two sought Miss Eloise without delay.

"I've told Jessie your secret," said Adele bursting in upon her teacher, "and she knows exactly the house for you and Mr. Davis. Her father can tell you all about it."

Miss Eloise looked up from her embroidery, a little flush mounting to her cheek. "What do you think of my secret, Jessie?" she asked drawing the little girl to her side.

"I think it is a very nice one for Mr. Davis," she answered.

Miss Eloise laughed, and Miss Betty said, "I must tell him that."

"Why don't you think it is nice for me?" Miss Eloise asked Jessie.

"Maybe I shall think it is nice if you live in 'The Beeches,'" she said.

"Then we surely must see about it. Is the

name of the place 'The Beeches,' and is it near here?"

"It is just beyond our place," Jessie told her, "but the house hasn't been lived in for a long time. The man who owns it has gone abroad and wants to sell it. My father can tell you all about it, for we have the keys at our house."

"Then we must certainly see about it," said Miss Eloise, turning to Miss Betty. "That would just suit, Betty, and I should rather be on this side the railroad, for then we should be between Appledore and Fulton so we could control both. Thank you, Jessie, for coming to tell me. Of course we shall not open our school till next fall, but if the house is out of repair it will take some time to put it in order, and one should be in plenty of time for such things. Must you go now?"

"Yes, it is getting late," said Jessie, "and I mustn't be out after dark."

"I hope you are bundled up warm," said Miss Betty, "for it is getting so cold."

"I'll run all the way," said Jessie, "and that will keep me warm." She made her adieux and started off, her thoughts full of Miss Eloise and her secret.

CHAPTER XII
What Was Found Out

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THAT winter had really come was made apparent the next morning when a light fall of snow covered the ground. Jessie looked out of her window and saw that Playmate Polly wore a white hood and that a scarf of snow hung down on one side of her. "I think it looks rather well," said Jessie to herself. "I wonder if mother will let me go where I can see closer. I have never been to Polly's in winter time. I wish it were Saturday."

She was so excited over the new snow that she could scarcely wait till breakfast was over to go down the hill toward the brook. Mrs. Loomis consented to her making a short call upon Playmate Polly. "For I do so want to see her white hood," said Jessie, "and I will wear my rubbers so I shall not get my feet wet. If Adele comes tell her I will be back in five minutes, or may I stay ten minutes, mother?"

"Not longer," her mother told her.

She set off over the untrodden snow that lay between the house and the fence, but beyond this she discovered that some one had been before her, for there were footprints in the snow, queer little footprints that went on for a short distance and then stopped beginning again further on.

"Eb has been down to see Polly," said Jessie to herself. She ran on leaving her own footprints by the side of Eb's and when she was within a little distance of the row of willows, she saw that Eb was sitting on Polly's head, and was, as Adele said, whispering in her ear. Jessie stood still for a moment to watch him, and while she was looking suddenly he disappeared. Jessie was astonished. "Where in the world has he gone?" she exclaimed. "I saw him and then I didn't see him. I must go right there and ask Polly about it." She went on toward the tree and presently discovered that which had the appearance of a hood when she saw it from her window had now changed into a wreath upon Polly's head. "I think that is very funny," said Jessie.

She went close to the tree and looked up, and while she was looking, out popped Eb's black head from the centre of the wreath of snow. At sight of Jessie he began to scold and repeat his "Hallo" a great many times. "I do believe there is a hole there," said Jessie. "I never knew that before, but then I am not tall enough to see over the top of your head, Polly. That is why you have a wreath instead of a hood. I wish I could see in." She looked at Eb who was strutting uneasily about, and an idea came to her. "I do believe, Ebony Loomis," she exclaimed, "that is where you hide things!"

Full of this discovery, she ran up to the barn where she saw Sam. "I wish you would bring a ladder, Sam," she said. "I want to see if there is a hole in that little tree. I believe it is where Eb hides his treasures."

"You don't say so," said Sam. "What makes you think that?"

"I saw his tracks on the way down. First he would walk a little and then he would fly, for there were spaces between the tracks. When I got down there I saw him sitting on the tree, and I believe he had something in his beak, though I

couldn't see exactly. All of a sudden he wasn't there, but in a minute I saw his head pop up from the top of the tree." Not for the world would she have divulged to Sam that Playmate Polly was really a person. He would never understand how such a thing could be.

"I shouldn't wonder if you was right," said Sam. "I can't go down just this minute, but after a while I will go and look."

"I wish you could go now," said Jessie, "for I have got to go to school."

"Wish I could," Sam answered, "but I will go before you get back. I reckon if there is anything there it will stay. He ain't likely to move it." Jessie was obliged to be satisfied with this, and knowing it was high time she was off to her lessons, she went up to the house for her books, stopping to tell her mother of what she suspected Eb. But there was not much time to discuss it then, for it was getting late and she must hurry away.

She found Adele in a high state of excitement over the arrival of the big dog her father had promised her. He was a beautiful collie, and already had attached himself to his little mistress.

It is safe to say that lessons did not receive the attention they should that morning. Moreover even Eb's tricks were lost sight of in the presence of the new pet. So Adele was not told of what Jessie had seen that morning.

Indeed it was not till after dinner that Jessie remembered that Sam was going to investigate the top of Playmate Polly's snow-wreathed head; and she hunted him up to find out what he had discovered. He was not at the barn where she first looked for him, but as she turned from there she heard a chop-chopping from the direction of the brook. What was Sam doing? She hurried toward the spot, and saw him with axe uplifted. She uttered one cry of dismay and the next minute Polly toppled over and lay prostrate on the ground. She ran toward the fallen figure of her late companion. "Oh, poor Polly," she whispered under her breath, her eyes full of tears.

When she reached the place where Playmate Polly had stood Sam was bending over a hollow stump. He looked up with a laugh. "You was right," he said. "Here's that little black thief's treasure." He put his hand into the stump and drew forth the three spoons, a brass thimble, some

shining bits of glass, several bright buttons, and, last of all, Adele's lost Peter Pan. "Well, I never!" exclaimed Sam.

Jessie drew a long sigh. "Oh, Sam," she said tremulously, "why did you have to cut it down?"

"It wasn't no good," said Sam. "Hollow all through. Your father said it had best come down, and then we could see what that rascal had hid there."

"But I liked her," said Jessie sadly, feeling that she had been the cause of Playmate Polly's downfall.

Sam looked at her curiously. "First time I ever heard a tree called *her*," he said.

Jessie looked at the chips scattered around, at Polly's head from which her wreath had fallen. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she sighed.

"What's the matter?" asked Sam. "Ain't you glad to get your doll baby back?"

"It isn't mine; it's Adele's," said Jessie. "Yes, I am very glad to get that. Oh, Sam!" she cried in alarm as she saw him with axe again uplifted, "you're not going to chop her to pieces!"

Sam lowered the axe. "I thought I might as well," he said. "Make a little fire-wood."

"Please don't! Please don't!" she cried.

"Well, you're a funny one all right," said Sam shouldering his axe. "Settle it with your father; 'tain't no odds to me."

Jessie stood for a moment looking at the prostrate Polly and then she turned and walked slowly to the house, carrying with her the three spoons and the little scarlet-coated Peter Pan. She went into the sitting-room and laid the things on the table. "Mother," she said solemnly, "Playmate Polly is dead."

Mrs. Loomis looked up from her sewing. "What on earth do you mean, daughter?" she said.

Jessie picked up the things she had laid on the table. "Sam has felled her to the earth," she said, "and he found these."

Mrs. Loomis tried to hide a smile at Jessie's tragic manner. "What did he find?" she asked.

Jessie handed her the spoons and the doll.

"Then the crow did hide them, and it was you who found him out."

"Yes, I did it," returned Jessie. "Poor Polly! I did it."

"My dear little girl," said Mrs. Loomis, "you

mustn't feel badly about an old hollow tree. I suppose Sam had to cut it down in order to get at the things."

"Yes, I suppose so," returned Jessie, "but I did like her so much. Will she have to be chopped up for fire-wood, mother? Sam was going to do it, but I stopped him, and he said I must settle it with father. Do you suppose he will care if she isn't?"

"I don't imagine he will care at all, for a little old tree like that would be small loss."

"Will you ask him not to?"

"Why, yes, if you like; but why not ask him yourself?"

"I don't like to talk to any one but you about Polly," said Jessie after a pause. "Even Adele never could understand."

Mrs. Loomis kissed the rather woe-be-gone little face. "Then, my darling," she said, "I am very sorry you have lost your Polly, and you may rest assured that she shall stay just as she lies as long as you wish. I am very glad to get back the spoons, though I am sorry they could not have been discovered in another place."

"I am glad to get back Adele's doll, too. Here

she comes now, mother, and she has her lovely dog with her."

Adele came in with a rush, her dog, which she had named Rob, frisking after her. "Go out, Rob," cried Adele. "Aunt Betty said I could bring him if I promised he shouldn't come in the house. His feet are all wet." She closed the door after Rob, shutting him out on the porch, where he lay down to wait for her. "Why, where did you find my Peter Pan?" asked Adele whose quick eyes spied the doll first thing.

"Sam found it and the spoons in a hollow tree. It was Eb who took it and the spoons, too. He hid them with some other things."

"I knew it was Polly," said Adele with a laugh. "I always said she had them."

"Oh, Adele, don't talk that way," returned Jessie in a distressed voice. "Polly is dead."

Adele looked at her for a minute to see if she really were in earnest. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Sam had to chop her down to get at the things. They were down so deep he couldn't reach them."

"Oh," said Adele, "I am sorry, Jessie, I truly am, and I wish I had never said mean things

about her. I shall never, never, never, be so horrid again."

Playmate Polly was allowed to lie where she had fallen, and in time the green grass and flowering weeds grew up all around her and quite hid her from view. And the next year there was no thievish crow to hide away his spoils in hollow trees. For with the spring came visitors of his own kind, among them such a charming young lady crow as caused Eb to forsake his old friends, and he flew away with the flock to live a wild life. Once Jessie passing along through the orchard heard something above her head cry out: "Hallo!" and she believed the black wings which she saw among the branches must belong to her old pet, and the next winter a pair of crows came often, when the snow was on the ground, to feed with the chickens. Minerva never drove them away, for she believed it was Eb and his mate who had returned to his familiar haunts, counting upon receiving hospitality.

Thus Jessie lost two of her companions, but as time went on she and Adele became closer friends, who were happy with Rob, Cloudy and the dolls. Before it was time to open the grotto again,

Adele had renamed her doll of the scarlet coat. "I shall call him Reddy," she said to Jessie, who understood that on account of Playmate Polly and the old quarrel, Adele wanted to be generous.

So Peter Pan had it all his own way, though he often went to see Reddy in a fine cave that Jessie helped Adele make for him.

Early in June Miss Eloise left the yellow house to be married, and one day, a couple of weeks after, there was a great stir and bustle at "The Beeches." Mrs. Loomis, Miss Betty, Dr. and Mrs. Sadtler were all on hand to welcome home the bride and groom. Jessie and Adele were on the watch for the carriage as it drove from the station. Adele was the first to spy it coming up the road. "There they are!" she cried.

"There they are," echoed Jessie. "Let's run and get the dears."

The two stood on the porch as Mr. and Mrs. Davis alighted. Adele was the first to rush forward and thrust something into Mr. Davis's arms. "This is for you," she cried.

"And this is for you." Jessie turned to Mrs. Davis and deposited in her arms a small black kitten.

Mr. Davis accepted the roly-poly puppy that Adele had given him and turning to his wife, he said, "You know all along, Eloise, I have declared we must have a dog."

"And I said no home could be complete without a cat," returned his wife laughing. "You are two dear children to supply our wants so soon," she said to the little girls.

"We think it is going to be lovely here," said Adele eagerly.

"Max and Walter are coming here to school," Jessie announced. "Are you glad to be our neighbors, Miss Eloise?"

"My dear, I am delighted. I didn't realize what a charming old place this really was. What have you all been doing to it?" She looked around upon a well ordered garden, upon a smoothly cut lawn, upon a freshly painted porch where boxes of flowers stood, and then she caught sight of the group within doors who were standing to welcome her. "You dear people," she said holding out her hands. "How good you are to us, and how the whole place is changed. What fairy work is this?"

"You must ask these little girls," said Mrs.

Loomis, smiling down at Jessie and Adele. "They put it into our heads, and said it was a shame for you to come home to a dingy old house, to a neglected lawn and a flowerless garden, and so we thought, too. Therefore we have all taken turns in seeing that things were done as they should be. And now come in to supper."

"Supper?" Mrs. Davis looked at her husband. "And we looked forward to an empty house with a still emptier larder. We said we should have to picnic for days till we could get the house in running order." Still holding the kitten, she put her free arm around both little girls, and they wondered why her eyes should be full of tears. "We shall never feel like strangers here, Fred," she said to Mr. Davis.

"Indeed, I should say not," he replied. "This is a true home-coming."

All summer long work went on in the big white house till fall found it ready with class rooms, with a new gymnasium, with pretty sleeping rooms for the boarding pupils. And every room was filled, while the day scholars were not a few.

Jessie and Adele started off together. Max and Walter had already gone on ahead. Adele was unusually thoughtful on the way. "What are you thinking of?" Jessie asked her. "You are so quiet."

"I was thinking about a lot of things," was the reply. "I was thinking suppose papa had not found the yellow house for us to live in, then I should never have known you, Miss Eloise would never have found 'The Beeches,' and I might have been far away somewhere, just as lonely as I was before."

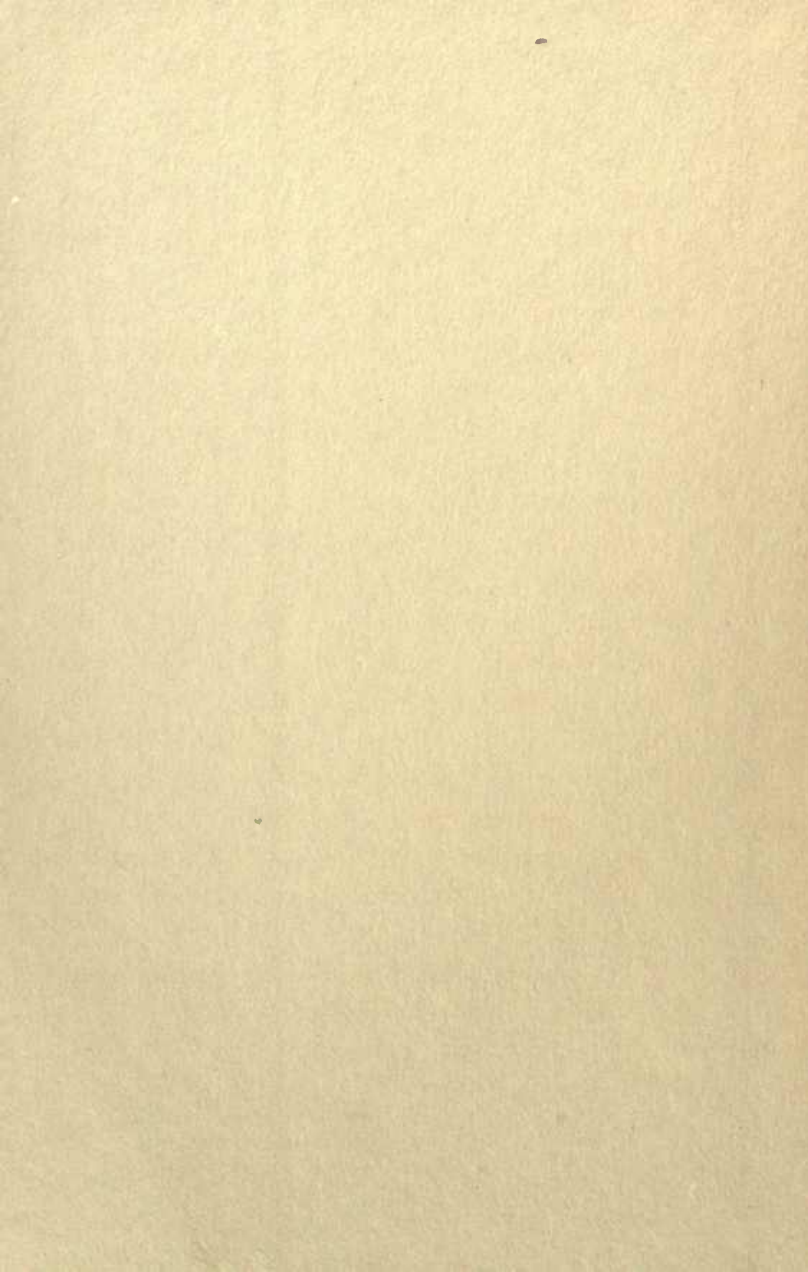
"But you did come to the yellow house, you see," said Jessie, "and now we are friends and are always going to the same school."

"And after we grow up we shall still be friends. Say we shall, Jessie."

"Of course," returned Jessie.

Max ahead of them called over his shoulder, "You two had better hurry up. We don't want to be late the first day."

The two girls increased their lagging pace. "We're coming," Jessie called.



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